

The Impact of In-Office, Remote, and Hybrid Work Models on Burnout and Employee Engagement

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Abstract

The present study examined the differential effects of in-office, hybrid, and remote work arrangements on employee burnout and work engagement. As organizations increasingly adopt flexible work structures, understanding their psychological implications has become critical for occupational health and human resource management. A sample of 240 employees ($n = 85$ hybrid, $n = 80$ in-office, $n = 75$ remote) completed the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT-12) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9). A one-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) and follow-up univariate ANOVAs were conducted. Results indicated significant group differences ($p < .001$), with in-office employees reporting markedly higher burnout ($M = 40.89$) and lower engagement ($M = 22.14$) relative to flexible-work counterparts. A strong negative correlation between burnout and engagement (Spearman's $\rho = -0.884$, $p < .001$) was also observed. These findings suggest that flexible work arrangements serve as significant psychological buffers against occupational burnout by enhancing autonomy and reducing job demands. Organizations are encouraged to design work structures that support employee autonomy to foster a healthier, more motivated, and resilient workforce.

Keywords: Burnout, Employee Engagement, Hybrid Work, In-Office Work, Remote Work

1. Introduction

The essence of work has radically changed during the last decade and especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. The trends in work include flexible work models, such as remote, hybrid, and traditional in-office work, that have become common in all industries. Such organizational transformations have changed the psychological requirements of employees, social interactions, and motivation, and burnout and engagement have become key issues in organizational psychology and human resource management (Budhwar et al., 2023; Lupu et al., 2024).

Burnout and work engagement are opposing conceptual, but empirically correlated occupational states. Burnout, which is also described as chronic fatigue, cynicism, and lessening professional efficacy, occurs when the demands of the job are repeatedly high and the resources needed to manage them are not available (Maslach and Leiter, 2016). Engagement, which implies a positive, fulfilling status with vigor, devotion, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002), is a motivational orientation to work. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model offers a theoretical framework that is unifying in that it suggests that the health-impairment process that results in burnout is driven by demands, whereas motivation process underlying engagement is driven by resources (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

Various work arrangements have different modulating effects on the balance of demands and resources. The in-office option offers social benefits and role identification alongside a commuting burden, strict work schedules, and managerial stress (Ross, 2021; Oxendahl, 2024). Remote work provides freedom and less commuting requirements but may create isolation, work-life confusion, and work-related burnout (Kaltiainen et al., 2022; Yume, 2023). Hybrid models aim to strike a balance between these factors, but their psychological consequences depend on organizational support, the quality of communication, and managing boundaries (Drayton, 2023; Nagori and Lawton, 2024).

The empirical evidence on flexible work arrangements is diverse and even conflicting (Desiatco et al., 2024; Tanaskovic et al., 2025). Simultaneous comparisons of any of the three models of work at once, especially conducted through validated and multidimensional scales of both burnout and engagement, are underrepresented in the literature, particularly in developing economies. The current research fills this gap by comparing employees working in an office, hybrid, and remote settings on burnout and engagement and researching the correlation between the two constructs.

2. Objectives

The purpose of the study was to: (1) compare burnout and engagement scores among the three work arrangements; (2) determine subscale burnout and engagement differences (exhaustion, mental distance, emotional impairment, cognitive impairment, and dedication, absorption); and (3) estimate the relationship between total burnout and total engagement.

3. Hypotheses

H1: Burnout will be significantly different among in-office, hybrid, and remote workers, where in-office workers will have higher burnout.

H2: Work engagement among work arrangement groups will have significant differences with the flexible workers reporting higher work engagement.

H3: Total burnout and total work engagement will have a significant negative correlation.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical perspective of the study is the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001). It puts forward two parallel processes: a health-impairment process, where the overload of job demands exhausts psychological resources and results in burnout; and a motivational process, where job resources encourage engagement. These demands and resources are configured differently by work arrangements. Flexible arrangements can make some of the demands (e.g., commuting, strict supervision) less and some resources (e.g., autonomy, control of the schedule) more, and office-based work can increase some demands (environmental pressures) and social resources (peer support, instant feedback) (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Maslach and Leiter, 2016).

The measurement of burnout is based on the Burnout Assessment Tool, which comprises exhaustion, mental distance, emotional impairment, and cognitive impairment (Schaufeli et al., 2020). It is a development of the seminal Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach and Jackson, 1981) that considers the cognitive and emotional aspects in a more comprehensive manner. Work engagement is measured with the UWES-9, a validated measure of vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

4.2 Work Arrangements and Burnout

Studies have continuously associated traditional office employment with high burnout potential. Strict schedules, the need to commute to work, and a lack of control over the surrounding environment are the factors that lead to emotional burnout and decreased professional effectiveness (Ross, 2021; Oxendahl, 2024). On the other hand, remote work has the potential to minimize certain structural stressors such as flexibility in scheduling and the removal of commuting. Nevertheless, telecommuters have unique threats such as role ambiguity, social isolation, telepressure, and digital exhaustion, which undermine psychological health over time (Kaltiainen et al., 2022; Yume, 2023; Bergefurt et al., 2021).

Lestan and Kabok (2023) contrasted the burnout of all three arrangements and revealed that hybrid workers experienced the lowest level of burnout, remote workers experienced the highest, and in-office workers experienced the average level of burnout. Oxendahl (2024), however, discovered that completely remote workers had lower levels of role confusion and emotional burnout compared to hybrid ones, which indicated that a lack of clarity about the expectations of hybrid presence could create a strain itself. These inconsistent results highlight that contextual factors, especially leadership clarity, organizational communication, and individual capacity to manage the boundaries, are involved in the outcomes of burnout.

4.3 Work Engagement and Flexible Arrangements

The perceived autonomy and trust have been linked to the increased engagement due to flexible work arrangements. In their cross-national sample (N = 412) study comparing the United Kingdom and India, Budhwar et al. (2023) showed that hybrid employees had higher engagement and lower stress when compared to fully remote employees, which is due to the importance of physical presence regularly to maintain organizational identification and social cohesion. In a similar way, Kaltiainen et al. (2022) and Kumar et al. (2024) reported the depletion of vigor and absorption by digital fatigue in remote settings.

Drayton (2023) posited that engagement benefits of hybrid work are not inherent but can be achieved through the quality of implementation that includes role expectations, remote and in-office employee equity, and autonomy as a guiding design principle. Tanaskovic and colleagues (2025) compiled 38 empirical studies and found a so-called productivity paradox, where remote work positively impacts personal productivity but endangers long-term engagement and team cohesion, with structural flexibility to be accompanied by relational and organizational facilitations.

4.4 Burnout-Engagement Relationship

Burnout and engagement are empirically negatively correlated, although their conceptual differences are quite clear (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Job demands that are high and drain resources at the same time lower engagement, and raise burnout, whereas sufficient resources cushion burnout and stimulate engagement. Desiatco et al. (2024) found that both outcomes were moderated by work-life balance independently among millennial remote-workers, and Manaois (2024) highlighted that psychological detachment during off-hours played a protective role. These results indicate the relevance of exploring the two constructs in tandem in the varying work arrangements.

5. Method

5.1 Participants

A total of 240 employees participated in the study (n = 85 hybrid, n = 80 in-office, n = 75 remote). Purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants in various organizations in India. The inclusion criteria included a minimum of six months of full time employment in their current work set up

and voluntary informed consent. Those that had adjusted work arrangements in the last three months were excluded to manage the adjustment effects. The sample included people who work in different fields, such as technology, finance, education, and healthcare.

5.2 Measures

5.2.1 Burnout Assessment Tool: Short Version (BAT-12)

The BAT-12 (Schaufeli et al., 2020) is a 12-item scale evaluating four areas of burnout: exhaustion (three items), mental distance (three items), emotional impairment (three items), and cognitive impairment (three items). Items are scored using a 5-point frequency scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always). The total scores have a range of 12-60 with higher scores representing more severe burnout. BAT-12 is highly reliable and construct valid among occupational samples (Schaufeli et al., 2020).

5.2.2 Utrecht Work Engagement Scale - Short Version (UWES-9)

The UWES-9 (Schaufeli et al., 2002) is a scale that measures three dimensions of engagement: vigor (three items), dedication (three items), and absorption (three items). The items are rated from 0 to 6 (7 points) (Never to Always). Higher total scores indicate more engagement. The UWES-9 is one of the most popular and validated engagement tools used in the research of occupational psychology.

5.3 Procedure

Online data was collected using a structured questionnaire via Google Forms. A research information sheet was provided to the participants, which contained the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, and confidentiality assurances. Informed consent was acquired through written informed consent. The questionnaire consisted of a demographic part (age, sex, education level, overall work experience, and type of work arrangement) and the BAT-12 and UWES-9. The Department of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous) provided the ethical approval.

5.4 Data Analysis

JASP and SPSS were used to analyze the data. Initial assumption tests included a Shapiro-Wilk test on multivariate normality and Box M test of homogeneity of covariance matrices. Since both the assumption of normality and that of homogeneity were violated to a significant degree, the Pillai Trace, as a more robust MANOVA statistic, was used as the main test criterion. One-way MANOVA was used to test how work arrangement (in-office, hybrid, remote) had an effect on the aggregate burnout and engagement outcome. Univariate ANOVAs of each dependent variable were followed up with statistically significant multivariate effects. The relationship between the total burnout and the total engagement was assessed using Spearman rank-order correlation due to the non-normality of the scores.

6. Results

6.1 Assumption Checks

Shapiro-Wilk tests verified that there were significant deviations of normality in all groups and variables (W range = 0.842 to 0.952, all p s < .01). Box's M test revealed heterogeneous covariance matrices for both burnout (chi-square = 73.249, p = .001) and engagement (chi-square = 119.329, p = .001). In response, Pillai's Trace was taken as the main multivariate criterion that was used to establish the strength of the results (Trace = 0.658, F = 58.04, p < .001).

6.2 Burnout-Engagement Correlation

A Spearman rho correlation between total burnout and total engagement was strong and negative (ρ = -

0.884, $p = .001$, $N = 238$), which supported H3. The conceptual antagonism of the two constructs was confirmed since employees with a high burnout score had a lower engagement score consistently.

6.3 Group Differences in General Burnout and Engagement

Descriptive statistics showed that there were significant differences between work arrangement groups. In-office employees reported the highest burnout ($M = 40.89$, $SD = 9.72$) and the lowest engagement ($M = 22.14$, $SD = 11.75$). By contrast, hybrid employees reported low burnout ($M = 22.29$, $SD = 6.18$) and high engagement ($M = 45.13$, $SD = 6.30$), and remote employees demonstrated similarly favorable profiles (Burnout: $M = 20.67$, $SD = 5.13$; Engagement: $M = 46.01$, $SD = 5.48$).

The MANOVA showed a statistically significant multivariate effect of work arrangement on the combined outcome variables, Wilks Lambda = 0.347, $F(4, 472) = 82.19$, $p = .001$. Follow-up univariate ANOVAs confirmed significant group differences for total engagement, $F(2, 237) = 210.60$, $p < .001$, and total burnout, $F(2, 237) = 188.65$, $p < .001$. These results support H1 and H2.

6.4 Burnout Subscale Differences

MANOVA of the four BAT-12 subscales yielded a significant multivariate effect, Wilks Lambda = 0.374, $F(8, 468) = 37.18$, $p < .001$. Univariate ANOVAs confirmed significant differences across all four dimensions: exhaustion, $F(2, 237) = 159.89$, $p < .001$; mental distance, $F(2, 237) = 157.83$, $p < .001$; emotional impairment, $F(2, 237) = 147.16$, $p < .001$; and cognitive impairment, $F(2, 237) = 169.04$, $p < .001$. The in-office employees rated approximately twice as high as the remote employees in all the subscales (e.g., exhaustion: $M = 10.40$ vs. $M = 5.28$; mental distance: $M = 10.25$ vs. $M = 5.00$).

6.5 Engagement Subscale Differences

Similar results were found with MANOVA of the UWES-9 subscales, which produced a significant multivariate effect, Wilks Lambda = 0.355, $F(6, 470) = 53.14$, $p < .001$. Univariate ANOVAs confirmed significant group differences for vigor, $F(2, 237) = 174.51$, $p < .001$; dedication, $F(2, 237) = 171.22$, $p < .001$; and absorption, $F(2, 237) = 191.16$, $p < .001$. The absorption scores of remote employees and hybrid employees were almost twice higher than those of in-office employees (Remote: $M = 15.48$; Hybrid: $M = 15.06$; In-office: $M = 7.38$).

7. Discussion

The results of the present research can be viewed as strong empirical evidence of the hypothesis that work arrangements are important determinants of employee burnout and engagement. In line with the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001), employees working in the office, with a higher level of structural demand (inflexible schedules, commuting stress, less control over the environment), reported significantly higher burnout on all four dimensions and significantly lower engagement on all three UWES-9 dimensions. In contrast, hybrid and remote workers, who enjoy more freedom, flexibility, and control over working conditions, exhibited much less burnout and higher engagement.

It is interesting to note that the results of burnout and engagement between employees working in hybrid and remote settings in this sample are almost the same. This is opposed to certain earlier studies that find that hybrid arrangements are best (Budhwar et al., 2023; Lestan and Kabok, 2023) and instead agrees with the results of Oxendahl (2024), who concludes that clearly defined remote arrangements can provide positive psychological results. The outcome can be a manifestation of a sufficient support system within the organization sampled, or it can be an indication that the main psychological advantage is the autonomy per se, which is either exercised to the full extent remotely or in a hybrid form. Future studies could unravel this by evaluating perceived organizational support and autonomy as mediating variables.

The high negative correlation between burnout and engagement ($\rho = -0.884$) is a confirmation of the earlier theoretical hypotheses and their generalization to the sample of diverse work arrangements in an Indian organization. This result supports the dual-process model of Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) and aligns with the results of Desiatco et al. (2024), who observe that work-life balance both decreases burnout and increases engagement. Notably, the level of this correlation indicates that changes aimed at alleviating burnout will tend to have secondary effects on engagement, and vice versa, such that both constructs should be targeted by organizational intervention.

7.1 Implications

These findings have practical implications for organizational leaders, HR professionals, and policymakers. The statistics highlight that office working, as it is presently organized, has significant psychological expenses on workers. Firms with strong reasons to be at the office full-time must employ specific interventions to lower structural pressures, such as flexible work hours, commuting allowances, specific recovery periods, and enhanced supervisory assistance, and develop resources by creating clarity of roles, social bonding, and positive reinforcement loops.

In organizations that adopt, or are contemplating adopting flexible work models, the results indicate that the organization structure and quality of implementation are as important as the structure itself. According to Drayton (2023) and Nagori and Lawton (2024), only with the foundation of clarity, autonomy, and equity does hybrid work lead to positive results. HR policies must thus outline clear requirements on hybrid presence, provide equal access to collaboration opportunities despite location, as well as invest in digital tools that minimize rather than increase cognitive load.

7.2 Limitations

There are a number of constraints that should be mentioned. The cross-sectional design does not allow the researcher to make a cause-effect conclusion; perhaps, lower-baseline burnout employees volunteer into flexible work. The sample was selected in India and is not necessarily representative of a variety of cultural settings where different norms (collectivism) or specific labor regulations influence the results of work organization (Tanaskovic et al., 2025). Moreover, the research is based on self-report data, which is prone to the social desirability bias. Causal interpretation is not as profound as it could be because of the lack of objective performance data, longitudinal tracking, and measurement of mediating variables (e.g., perceived autonomy, organizational support, boundary management). The longitudinal and mixed-method designs with both organizational-level and individual-level moderators should be used to overcome these limitations in future research.

8. Conclusion

The current research provides systematic comparative data that work arrangements have important and multidimensional impacts on employee burnout and engagement at work. It is observed that employees working in the office were significantly more psychologically depleted in all four dimensions of burnout and significantly less engaged in all three dimensions of the UWES-9. Autonomy and flexibility, as opposed to physical presence itself, emerged as key protective factors as shown by the similar protective profile of hybrid and remote workers. The strong negative correlation between burnout and engagement supports the significance of considering the two constructs as mutually reinforcing aspects of occupational well-being. With organizations going through the dynamic post-pandemic work environment, these results support evidence-based, autonomy-supportive work design that considers both the psychological health of employees and organizational performance as priorities.

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