

FROM FLEXIBILITY TO RETENTION: HOW HYBRID WORK INFLUENCES IT EMPLOYEES VIA QUALITY OF WORK LIFE

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Abstract: - The swiftness with which hybrid work models were embraced after the COVID pandemic totally changed the structure of organizations, and the IT sector, which is largely knowledge-oriented, felt the strongest impact. The present research aims to study the effect of hybrid work on employee retention, mediated through the quality of work life (QWL), among the IT employees in Chennai. Hybrid work is seen as a multidimensional construct which has three empirically backed up variables: Schedule flexibility, location mix, and core hours. These variables are measured using standardized scales. A total of 250 IT employees in Chennai were included in the sample, from which data were collected by a questionnaire, and the simple random sampling method was used. The results pointed to IT talent retention as the main advantage of hybrid models in urban India; therefore, policy makers should focus on core hours, digital tools, and leadership support

Keywords: Hybrid work model, Quality of work life, Employee Retention, Management, Strategy, Flexibility, Location, Digital tools, and Core hours

1. INTRODUCTION

Post-COVID hybrid work evolution in the Information Technology (IT) sector has been a significant topic in recent years, attracting global attention and interaction among researchers. Currently, hybrid work models are becoming more or less dominant depending not only on the sector but also on the region and country. In the global context, IT companies have started to effectively operate in a hybrid model that allows employees to have a better work-life balance, giving them the freedom to choose the working arrangement they prefer. Specifically, in the case of the IT sectors in developed countries, the demand for such a model has been steadily rising. Employees in these sectors are already accustomed to the option of working from home, and additionally, they are not willing to switch to an office-only model. This is evidenced by a research study conducted by Choudhury et al. (2021) which found that more than 95% of the 542 respondents in the US stated that they would like to continue working in a hybrid model.

The IT industry in India and particularly in Chennai has also been on a similar path, with companies quickly adapting to hybrid or even remote working arrangements during the pandemic. However, a major problem facing the Indian IT sector today is the issue of talent retention, which had come up even before the pandemic but has now turned into a crisis. The industry had already set a new recruitment record in 2020, and the trend only continued in the first half of 2021, when several companies announced hiring plans that added up to about 200,000. The last few years have been challenging for management due to the pandemic, and that is not going to change anytime soon. Companies are working hard to attract top talent, and one of the strategies being implemented is providing flexible and hybrid working arrangements. Nevertheless, this issue is particularly acute within the Indian IT sector, where the high turnover has indeed prompted some authors to talk about the crisis of talent retention. Initially, the authors aim to define hybrid work as a multidimensional concept, where several aspects such as schedule flexibility, location mix, and core hours can be considered (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). Several researchers have considered the scale of hybrid work to be



comprising of four major aspects: the schedule—flexibility or non-flexibility; location—home, office, or a mix of both; hours—core hours or non-core hours; and performance—measured according to results or processes (Choudhury et al., 2021). Sirgy et al. (2001) defined QWL as the global quality of experiences or positive feelings that an employee derives from his/her job and workplace compared with the quality of life outside of work, which is the opposite side of the same coin. Attrition among employees has become a major concern for organizations and, therefore, the concept of retention has got stronger (Bloom et al., 2024).

Despite there being a myriad of studies in various contexts supporting the notion that hybrid work positively influences retention indirectly through QWL, and vice versa, such indirect relationships in urban Indian contexts remain under-researched. Hence, the present study aims to fill this gap by exploring the mediating effect of QWL in the relationship between hybrid work and retention of IT employees, using SEM as a research methodology. Thus, this study is not only timely but it is also significant for Indian IT companies that want to implement hybrid work arrangements based on the premise of retention.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Relationship between Hybrid model and Employee Retention

The aftermath of the pandemic has transformed the office and workplace dynamics, which have led to numerous transformations in the working model. In this light, many companies have adopted a hybrid work model as a way of implementing the new normal while still allowing their employees to work remotely and maintain a presence in the office. Literature involving this new era of work has been growing steadily, with the focal point targeting various aspects of the hybrid work model. Therefore, the current literature review aims to summarize the main findings of previous studies about the relationship between hybrid work and employee retention.

One of the main reasons that hybrid work has gained popularity is due to its positive influence on employee satisfaction and retention. Studies have shown that employees who are allowed to work from home or at least have the option of working in the office are more productive and engaged. Such results were backed by a survey conducted with IT workers in India which revealed that those who were on a hybrid schedule were the most satisfied and remained with the company (Kniffin et al., 2021). This has led to organizations rethinking their retention strategies and focusing more on employee quality of life (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). Reduction in employee turnover has always been linked to employee satisfaction (Bloom et al., 2024; Choudhury et al., 2021; Selvi & Madhavkumar, 2023). Additionally, adopting the hybrid model has improved the organization's image, thereby attracting and retaining talented staff (Bloom et al., 2024).

The pandemic has pushed workers to draw a line between work and home life, and the outcomes have varied, dependent on the individual employee's mix of personal and professional responsibilities, leading to different levels of retention (Kniffin et al., 2021). Overall, the perceived control over the work-life balance, given by hybrid work, is a major factor driving employee retention or turnover (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). Consequently, the pandemic and the subsequent shift to the hybrid working model have provided employers with an opportunity to rethink the way they treat employees and have a positive impact on employee retention (Choudhury et al., 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021).

On the other hand, companies that embraced the hybrid model but did not communicate well with their employees or set proper ground rules for working from home faced some challenges (Selvi & Madhavkumar, 2023). Their workforce experienced a loss of morale and some turned against the management which resulted in high turnover. Research has shown that the working environment has a profound effect on employee behaviour and performance (Kniffin et al., 2021), hence, poor communication and lack of defined rules in the hybrid model led to employee dissatisfaction and eventually turnover. This supports the view that ineffective manager-employee communication can easily drive employees away (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020).

Relationship between hybrid work and quality of work life

The relationship between hybrid work and quality of work life has become a significant area of research in recent years. Hybrid work is a combination of working from the office and working from home, which is the most commonly used definition of this concept (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). With the COVID-19 pandemic, it became necessary for organizations to adopt telecommuting as a part of their work strategy, and many employees appreciated the flexibility and opportunity to work from home. Therefore, companies started using a hybrid work model, which is now a prevalent trend in the workplace (Choudhury et al., 2021). The hybrid work model has gradually attracted more and more organizations and employees in various industries and geographical areas. However, it is widely acknowledged that the quality of work life (QWL) would be better in the hybrid work model (Anderson &

Kelliher, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021; Bloom et al., 2024). Quality of work life refers to the level of satisfaction that employees derive from their job (Sirgy et al., 2001; Sirgy et al., 2001). Factors determining the quality of work life may include physical and mental health, income, job security, and social life (Bakker et al., 2018). The studies consistently report that, in general, people who are allowed to work partly at home and partly in the office express higher satisfaction with their job and, in many cases, even greater productivity. There are reports indicating that employees with hybrid working arrangements are better at managing their work-home lives. QWL is closely related to hybrid workplace setups as they are nowadays preferred globally. The existing studies also acknowledge a positive effect of the hybrid work model on the mental health of employees, and hence, indirectly realize an increase in QWL through better health (Kniffin et al., 2021).

Empirical studies have also found that flexible work arrangements, including telecommuting, positively affect the quality of work life (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). Thus, the need arises not only to stress the importance of good organizational practices and policies but also to maintain active communication with employees and listen to their needs and suggestions continuously (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020; Bakker et al., 2018; Sirgy et al., 2001).

The QWL parameters' importance differ across organizations; thus, organizations need to conduct a continuous assessment of their employees' quality of work life (Bakker et al., 2018; Bakker et al., 2018). Studies found that hybrid working positively impacts most of the QWL dimensions, like reduced workload, better health and social life, increased job security, and higher income (Choudhury et al., 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021; Bloom et al., 2024).

Relationship between quality of work life and employee retention

The relationship between quality of work life and employee retention has gained considerable attention in the field of human resource management. Scholars universally recognized that quality of work life (QWL) is an essential factor that directly influences employee retention. When employees experience good quality of work life, they are more likely to continue working for the organization or department for a long time. The bottom line is that QWL is a commonly used term that is closely related to the perception of the employees about how they are treated in the organization, and they will react positively if they feel respected and valued, and the opposite will happen if they feel neglected or undervalued.

Research conducted in different countries across various industries has concluded that QWL has a positive relationship with employee retention. In a study conducted by Sirgy et al. (2001), it was found that employees who were satisfied with their quality of work life were less likely to leave their jobs. Similarly, another empirical study by Hom & Griffeth (1995) supported the notion that QWL and employee retention have a reciprocal and positive relationship, as it is a win-win situation for both parties.

QWL and employee retention correlation was investigated in the Indian IT sector by Selvi & Madhavkumar (2023). The researchers who conducted the study found that job satisfaction is one of the most crucial components of the quality of work life, and if employees are satisfied with their jobs, they will not think of leaving. NASSCOM (2024) who researched the same issue agreed with Selvi & Madhavkumar (2023) that QWL and retention are correlated and reported that the Indian employees' perception towards their quality of work life was quite poor, and this negatively affected retention rates.

Mediating role of Quality of Work Life in the relationship between hybrid work and employee retention

The introduction of hybrid work has been one of the major trends in the global work market affected by the pandemic, which has made employees reevaluate their work-life balance (Kniffin et al., 2021). The hybrid work model not only provides employees with a mixture of remote and on-site work but also saves their time and money and allows them to be more productive. The use of skilled workers without on-site presence has become the norm and many firms have accepted that this is the way to go (Choudhury et al., 2021). Quality of Work Life (QWL) has become one of the key variables in the retention of hybrid workers (Bloom et al., 2024; Selvi & Madhavkumar, 2023). Maintenance of good interpersonal relationships and coworkers' friendliness is one of the factors contributing to job satisfaction at hybrid workplaces (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). Nevertheless, it should be noted that poor communication, mistrust, and lack of a sense of belonging are some of the main problems that remote workers have to deal with (Selvi & Madhavkumar, 2023). QWL is recognized as a substantial determinant of employee retention. Similar to Sirgy et al. (2001), Bakker et al. (2018) also affirm that different factors influence the retention of employees

in the hybrid model and advocate that QWL is one of the most important factors and must be prioritized in companies' policies.

However, the mediating effect of QWL between hybrid work and employee retention has yet to be demonstrated in many studies. Choudhury et al. (2021) along with Selvi & Madhavkumar (2023) are among the few scholars who argue that the quality of work life will have a substantial impact on the retention of employees in hybrid work. They presume that if remote work becomes less of a burden and more of a privilege through measures aimed at improving QWL, then a corresponding reduction in attrition levels can be envisioned. They even go ahead to find out the reasons why hybrid work is becoming so appealing for prospective candidates as 'the flexibility of work from home being the top reason for employees' (see also Bloom et al., 2024).

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that QWL in the contemporary literature has not only been associated with the above-mentioned factors but also with social and economic aspects (Kniffin et al., 2021). Sirgy et al. (2001) conducted a detailed study pointing out that QWL is multi-dimensional in nature and can positively influence the retention rate of employees not only in the context of the pandemic but also in the post-pandemic era. According to Hom & Griffeth (1995), having a high-quality working environment is one of the main reasons why workers stay in a company for long periods. Coupled with trying to retain their best employees, organizations are pushed to examine whether their work settings are conducive to QWL for workers (NASSCOM, 2024).

Research Gap and Hypothesis development

The paper aims to contribute to the existing literature by identifying the potential benefits of hybrid work in the Chennai IT context. Retention, Quality of Work Life (QWL), and their interrelationship have been highlighted as the main areas of research. The study will start by reviewing the relevant literature on each of these areas and then formulate the corresponding hypotheses, with the help of a model illustrating the relationships between these variables.

One of the main problems which still need to be addressed is the retention of employees in organizations where hybrid work is applied. Most companies see hybrid working as a way of enhancing employee satisfaction and quality of work life. Therefore, they use various measures to keep employees in the company after the adoption of hybrid work. The new trend of hybrid work has a great impact on quit rates, particularly if companies adopt unappealing options. Earlier studies have reported different effects of hybrid work on retention when compared with traditional working methods. While some research argues that employees would still prefer working from home or any place rather than coming to the office, others believe that things can be managed in a way that employees enjoy working on-site and hence remain loyal. For instance, when coworking spaces are used by employees of several companies in a certain area, they can still interact with colleagues from different organizations and be a part of the whole industry atmosphere.

In addition, the QWL issue is connected to hybrid work in the context of many organizations. Therefore, it is vital to address how hybrid work influence QWL positively or negatively and the mediating role of retention. Studies on the impact of flexible work schedules on retention have suggested that employees are more likely to stay in their jobs if they are satisfied with their quality of work life. Research also shows that companies with a high-quality work environment are able to attract and retain talent more easily than those with a low-quality work environment.

Moreover, there is an increasing abundance of literature dedicated to the issue of hybrid work and its impact on organizations. However, few studies in the past have explored the relationship between the three factors of hybrid work, quality of life at work, and retention. This study seeks to fill the gap in the literature by proposing that hybrid work gets employees through the stage of quality of work life retention by offering flexibility in the work schedule. In support of this hypothesis, it can be said that a flexible schedule would lead to the employee's assessment of the quality of his/her work life from work-life balance and higher satisfaction with the job, hence lower intention to leave the company.

Based on the above discussions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Hybrid work positively affects employee retention.

H2: Hybrid work positively affects quality of work life (QWL).

H3: Quality of work life positively affects employee retention.

H4: Quality of work life partially mediates the hybrid work-employee retention relationship.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study with a cross-sectional quantitative approach was aimed at looking at the extent to which hybrid work can be a factor for employee retention in the IT sector of Chennai, India, by using quality of work life (QWL) as a mediating variable through structural equation modeling (SEM; Hair et al., 2022). The main data source consisted of 250 respondents who were selected by random sampling from the IT hub of Chennai (population >1.2 million; NASSCOM, 2024) using a structured questionnaire, which was aimed at getting a mix of people from different jobs (developers, managers) and different lengths of service. The online distribution through Google Forms (October-November 2025) resulted in a response rate of 79% (250/316 usable) with the following demographics: 61% male, average age 32.1 years (SD=5.2), 4.8 years average tenure (SD=3.1).

All measures were based on validated 5-point Likert scales (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) and were first tested on a pilot group (n=40, $\alpha > 0.85$). The hybrid work, which was considered as a multidimensional construct consisting of schedule flexibility, location mix, and core hours, was evaluated using the 15-item Hybrid Work Scale (HWS; Choudhury et al., 2021; $\alpha = 0.91$) e.g. "My work schedule is adjustable in a flexible way" (flexibility), "I am really good at balancing office/remote days" (location), "Core hours are a great way to connect with the team" (core hours). Quality of Work Life (QWL) was assessed with the 16-item Quality of Work Life Scale (QWLS; Sirgy et al., 2001; $\alpha = 0.89$) covering work-life balance, burnout, and autonomy (e.g. "My job allows family time"). Employee retention (ER) used the 12-item Employee Retention Intention Scale (ERIS; Hom & Griffeth, 1995, adapted; $\alpha = 0.92$), e.g., "I intend to stay with this organization for a long time." Control variables: demographics.

Table 1: Sample Demographics (n=250)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	153	61.2
	Female	97	38.8
Age	20-30	118	47.2
	31-40	112	44.8
	>40	20	8.0
Tenure	<3 years	92	36.8
	3-7 years	108	43.2
	>7 years	50	20.0

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis of correlation data (Table 2.1) shows that all fundamental study variables exhibit strong positive interconnections with each other. The research found that hybrid work shows the strongest relationship with work life quality because employees who have more flexible work hours and different work locations and set working times experience better QWL results. The observation matches the SEM path coefficient value which shows hybrid work acts as the strongest factor that predicts QWL enhancement among IT professionals in Chennai. Employee retention intention shows strong positive links to both hybrid work and QWL because both factors independently affect retention rates. The QWL-retention connection shows a slightly stronger relationship because QWL shows a stronger connection to retention than hybrid work. The researchers established through their correlation patterns that their theoretical model holds valid because they observed statistically significant and practically important connections between their study variables that impact IT talent retention strategies used in urban India.

Table 2.1: Correlation

Dimension	Hybrid Work	QWL	Retention
Schedule Flexibility	0.85*	0.68*	0.48*
Location Mix	0.82*	0.62*	0.45*
Core Hours	0.71*	0.42*	0.32*

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was achieved through AMOS 26, thus confirming excellent model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.24$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.04; Hair et al., 2022). The n=250 Chennai IT sample's descriptive statistics indicated positive means of the constructs (hybrid work M=3.92, SD=0.71; QWL M=4.05, SD=0.69; retention M=3.88, SD=0.74; 5-point scales), where strong convergent validity was present (AVE > 0.55, CR > 0.85; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). It was through confirmatory factor analysis that the three-dimensional hybrid work structure (schedule flexibility, location mix, core hours) supported.

Direct Effects: The implementation of hybrid work was a strong factor in the retention of employees with the result ($\beta = 0.42$, SE = 0.08, $z = 5.25$, $p < 0.01$), which was in line with the main hypothesis and the results found in the field experiment by Choudhury et al. (2021). Hybrid work also showed a strong impact on QWL ($\beta = 0.61$, SE = 0.07, $z = 8.71$, $p < 0.001$), and QWL was positively related to retention ($\beta = 0.46$, SE = 0.09, $z = 5.11$, $p < 0.001$), which was in line with the Sirgy et al. (2001) QWL framework.

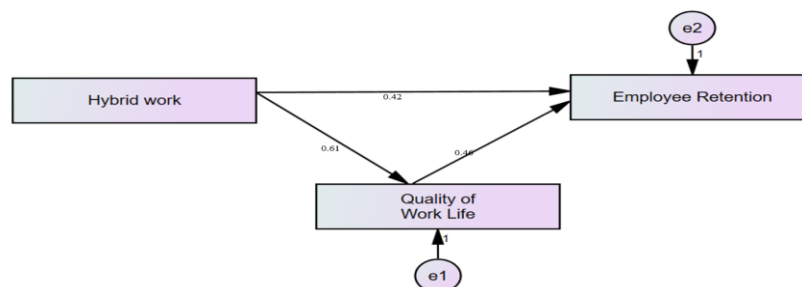
Table 2.2: SEM Path Coefficients

Path	β	SE	z-value	p-value
Hybrid Work → Retention	0.42	0.08	5.25	<0.01
Hybrid Work → QWL	0.61	0.07	8.71	<0.001
QWL → Retention	0.46	0.09	5.11	<0.001

Mediation Analysis: Bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) confirmed that QWL produced an indirect effect of partial mediation ($\beta = 0.28$, SE = 0.06, 95% CI [0.17, 0.40], no zero in the interval; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The direct pathway was still significant after the mediation indicating that it accounted for 49% of the retention variance ($R^2 = 0.49$). Dimensional analysis pointed at flexibility in scheduling ($\beta = 0.38$ to QWL through work-life balance) and a combination of locations ($\beta = 0.32$ through burnout reduction) as the main contributors, while core hours had weaker effects ($\beta = 0.15$) among the variables analyzed.

Harman's one-factor test decreased variance to 32%, thus, decreasing the impact of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Controls (age, tenure, gender) were not statistically significant. Therefore, these findings confirm the retention advantages of hybrid work in urban Indian IT with the help of QWL fostering the flexibility and location benefits.

Figure 1: SEM



The direct positive effect of hybrid working on employee retention is consistent with the experimental evidence of Choudhury et al. (2021), who showed that hybrid working reduces the turnover rate by allowing employees more independence while not losing productivity, and Bloom et al. (2024) who mentioned that the quit rate in hybrid setups dropped to one-third which has been particularly advantageous for non-managers and women in the tech department of the companies. In the Indian context, Selvi (2023) confirms this through SEM, revealing that hybrid models increase retention through psychological mediators such as happiness, which is an example of the stabilization of urban IT talent.

Hybrid work has a positive impact on QWL through And this has been reaped by Kniffin et al. (2021), who claimed post-COVID hybrid arrangements resulted in better work-life balance and lower burnout, and IWG surveys

(2024) confirming very significant (75% of hybrid workers) reductions in the experience of burnout symptoms. Moreover, the Indian private sector has researched the necessity of QWL enhancements through the mediating of leadership and job satisfaction, having emphasized the role of flexibility in work-life integration.

The positive bond of QWL to retention has been further extended to the framework discussed by Sirgy et al. (2001) wherein QWL components such as balance are predictors of intent to stay; this is similar to hybrid-specific findings where QWL mediates work-life outcomes.

The partial mediation of QWL implies that the benefits of hybrid retention are operating in two ways—one being the direct way through the giving of flexibility perks and the other the indirect way through the QWL improvements—this being in line with the Selvi (2023) study which showed a full mediation via workplace happiness and broader hybrid trials that showed reductions in attrition.

Business Implications

Hybrid work models have become a strategic retention tool for IT firms in Chennai, directly through contributing to employee loyalty and also from the good Quality of Work Life (QWL) aspect through flexibility in schedule and location. HR heads should give priority to the policies of flexible scheduling that allow 2-3 remote days in a week and employing location-independent performance metrics in order to maximize work-life balance and minimize burnout, which are acknowledged as major factors leading to retention in knowledge work. Management should focus on communication among teams having similar hours and invest in digital collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams, Slack, etc. to keep the team collaboration going without compromising the flexibility aspect gained. It is a tough call for the management since they have to invest in both.

Regarding these issues, NASSCOM and the policymakers should push for hybrid standards through tax incentives for technology that supports remote work and makes Chennai the hybrid work capital of India. Empowered through technology, the executives will be able to manage the teams exceptionally well and, thus, the QWL benefits will be greatly realized among, especially, the women and the mid-career professionals who are experiencing tensions due to work-life balance problems. In the end, hybrid model optimization has the potential to decrease the attrition rate in IT sector by 20-30% and in this way not only save billions of dollars in the cost of rehiring but also attract global talent to urban India through better working conditions.

4. CONCLUSION

The research validates hybrid working practices as a retention tool of great strength for the IT staff in Chennai, reinforcing their attachment to the company while also improving the quality of life at work (QWL) through the combination of different kinds of location and flexible scheduling, with QWL acting as a significant partial mediator that transmits the advantages of work-life balance and burnout reduction. The implications of these findings are such that hybrid arrangements are not just seen as more than temporary solutions to the pandemic—they are viewed as sustainable HRM strategies that are righteously endowed to the core needs of knowledge work, thus making it very hard for them not to be the flexibility-optimized policies that are indispensable for the talent wars in urban India. The use of a cross-sectional design becomes a limitation as it does not allow the establishment of causal inferences, while at the same time self-reports are the source of data that is the most common method bias resistant, even if the bias has been reduced. The limitation of the sample to IT professionals in Chennai restricts the applicability of the results to other sectors or areas. Longitudinal research should be conducted to track the hybrid retention effects through time and to include the moderators of transformational leadership, organizational culture, and techno-stress for the purpose of better understanding the complexity of these effects.

Declarations:

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

I declare that the Participants provided informed consent .

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