# Hybrid work reshapes employee behaviour as coffee badging and polyworking rise



The landscape of hybrid work continues to evolve, revealing a complex interplay between employee behaviour and corporate policies. A recent report from Owl Labs highlighted the persistent trend known as "coffee badging," where employees swipe their ID badges at the office only to leave shortly thereafter to work remotely. This phenomenon persists, with 44% of workers engaging in it, even as companies increase their push for return-to-office mandates.

Despite appearing to necessitate a return to physical workspaces, many employees are cleverly circumventing these expectations. A similar observation was noted in Forbes, which elaborated on how hybrid workers are utilising this practice to maintain a semblance of work-life balance amidst strict corporate policies. As the hybrid work paradigm matures, employees exhibit growing agency in navigating their work environments, often prioritising personal comfort over corporate directives.

Owl Labs' findings reveal that the hybrid work model remains popular, with 27% of employees still working in a hybrid format—an increase from the previous year. Additionally, 11% are fully remote, marking notable shifts in workplace dynamics. Amidst these changes, 41% of hybrid workers are in the office three days a week, although only 33% feel satisfied with this arrangement. This dissatisfaction underscores a potential discord between employee expectations and company policies, mirroring trends noted in other literature about the necessity of flexibility in modern work.

Polyworking, defined as holding multiple jobs simultaneously, is gaining traction, with 28% of workers currently engaged in this practice and 14% planning to start soon. Reports emphasise that this trend highlights a broader movement towards increased adaptability and income diversification among workers, allowing them to pursue opportunities that better align with their personal and professional goals.

Integrating technology plays a crucial role in this landscape, particularly with the increasing use of AI tools. According to Owl Labs, 24% of workers use AI on a daily basis, enhancing capabilities in areas such as scheduling and data analysis. This integration reflects a fundamental shift in workplace operations, allowing employees to streamline processes and reduce mundane tasks. Furthermore, younger generations are particularly reliant on these tools, with 70% of Gen Z workers indicating their constant use. Concerns regarding job stability in the wake of AI's prevalence have surfaced, suggesting that while technology aids daily tasks, it simultaneously incites anxiety about future job security.

Another pressing concern for workers is the impact of in-office requirements on their overall well-being. Owl Labs reported that 43% of employees are experiencing increased stress levels compared to the previous year, reflecting a correlation between rigid workplace expectations and mental health challenges. Other studies echo this sentiment, indicating that many employees feel the pressure of traditional expectations in their organisations, leading to desires for more flexible work arrangements.

Interestingly, the financial costs associated with hybrid work also manifest in unexpected ways. Workers report spending, on average, $42 more per day when commuting to the office compared to working from home. This revelation, along with the fact that up to 45% of workers feel apprehensive about their colleagues' political opinions, further illustrates the myriad factors influencing employee reluctance to return to in-person environments.

As the hybrid work model continues to shift, the discourse surrounding workplace flexibility shows no signs of slowing down. With over a third of workers publicly expressing dissatisfaction with their jobs on social media, it is clear that a significant portion of the workforce is seeking new roles that offer not only flexibility but also respect for their individual preferences and work styles.

Ultimately, the findings encapsulated in Owl Labs' report and corroborating literature suggest that hybrid work is not merely a transient phase but a fundamental re-evaluation of how work is perceived. Moving forward, organisations that adapt to these changing dynamics—embracing flexibility, technology integration, and employee preferences—will likely cultivate a more satisfied and productive workforce.

### Reference Map

1. All paragraphs draw on insights from the lead article.
2. Integrated insights from (2) regarding "coffee badging" and employee balance.
3. Supplemented with context from (3) on evolving workforce expectations.
4. Included observations from (4) on technology's role in adapting to hybrid work.
5. Discussed AI's significance from (5) in facilitating employee tasks.
6. Highlighted commuting costs insights from (6).
7. Contextualised stress and employee sentiment from (7).

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://virtualizationreview.com/articles/2025/05/16/hybrid-work-report-coffee-badging-continues-to-thwart-return-to-office-directives.aspx> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2023/07/29/employees-are-badging-in-and-then-working-from-home/> - A Forbes article discusses the phenomenon of 'coffee badging,' where employees clock in at the office but work from home shortly after. This practice is prevalent among hybrid workers, fueled by return-to-office mandates. The article emphasizes how many workers find ways to navigate these mandates to maintain work-life balance, reflecting a growing trend as companies struggle with in-office productivity.
3. <https://www.wework.com/ideas/professional-development/values-in-the-workplace/future-of-work/> - This WeWork article analyzes the future trends in hybrid working, including the rise of 'polyworking' where individuals juggle multiple roles. It explores how workforce expectations are evolving due to changing job markets and employee preferences, emphasizing the importance of flexibility and adaptability for modern-day employees.
4. <https://hbr.org/2023/03/employees-are-using-technology-to-find-comfort-in-uncertain-times> - Harvard Business Review highlights how technology, especially AI tools, is increasingly being utilized by employees to navigate the complexities of hybrid work. It discusses the rise in tools that enhance productivity and collaboration despite challenges posed by in-office requirements, indicating a new phase of workplace evolution.
5. <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/05/01/a-growing-number-of-employees-are-using-ai-tools-at-work.html> - CNBC reports that a significant portion of employees is leveraging AI tools in their daily tasks, aiming to streamline processes amidst evolving workplace dynamics. This trend showcases a shift towards technological integration in remote and hybrid setups, reflecting how employees are adjusting to demands for efficiency.
6. <https://www.axios.com/2023/04/12/workplace-trends-hybrid-remote-ai> - This Axios article delves into current workplace trends associated with hybrid and remote working, including the financial impacts of commuting. It breaks down employee preferences and the changing dynamics between employee demands and company policies, reinforcing the trend of flexible work options being crucial to job satisfaction.
7. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-05-02/work-from-home-culture-is-redefining-office-commutes> - Bloomberg outlines how the work-from-home culture is reshaping traditional commuting patterns and office attendance. The article discusses an increase in employee expectations for flexible working arrangements, alongside a rising awareness of work-life balance in the face of evolving corporate strategies.