

Hybrid work: productivity boost or pitfall?

A data-driven analysis



deskbird

Is hybrid work the productivity solution it's often claimed to be, or are we overlooking critical issues that could undermine long-term success? That's the central question for many companies as they navigate the evolving landscape of flexible work environments.

Productivity remains a crucial indicator of a successful company. But what is productivity in the context of hybrid work? How do we measure it, and what actually influences it in today's dispersed workplaces?

We decided to bring the question a little closer to home with a survey and a discussion with Harriet Molyneaux, HSM Managing Director, for a deeper look into how this multi-faceted idea has changed because of hybrid work models.

Defining productivity: short-term vs. sustainable

Harriet, how should we define productivity?

“This question is top of mind for many of the organizations I speak with right now,” Harriet explains.

“In their quest for productivity, many organizations are piling on the pressure to increase the number of calls per hour for contact center colleagues and scaling back their hybrid working flexibility. And I get it – when you take a traditional, short term and commercial view of productivity, these all feel like good decisions. So why aren’t these tactics working?..



Harriet Molyneaux
Managing Director, HSM

..Well, I think
**the metrics organizations
look at aren't always the full
data picture of productivity".**

Harriet emphasizes the need to focus on tactical short-term metrics and **sustainable productivity KPIs**—those human, long-term components like energy, focus, well-being, and team performance.

While traditional metrics like **output per hour and the number of tasks completed** are still helpful, they ignore the many hybrid models and how work and employees evolve.

Organizations must be aware of these changes and focus more on **long-term human metrics** that reflect the work completed and how effectively and sustainably that work is achieved rather than just the total number of tasks.



To better understand this concept, here are a few examples of human metrics you should include in your team's productivity evaluation:





Employee well-being

By conducting surveys on **job satisfaction**, **stress levels**, and overall **mental health**, you can better understand how your employees feel at work (and avoid burnout).



Focus and attention

Hybrid work environments can lead to more distractions, and attention can fluctuate. You can track this KPI through surveys where employees rate their ability to focus during remote work versus office work. Or use **productivity tools** like time-tracking apps to rate how much uninterrupted time employees have for deep work.



Energy levels

This is a less traditional metric, but understanding how energized employees feel during their workday offers essential insight into long-term productivity. **Pulse checks** are beneficial.



Collaboration and team cohesion

Measuring the frequency and quality of team interactions (either with collaboration tools or surveys) is essential for understanding how well teams function in flexible work environments.



Learning and development

Surprisingly, this is also a key indicator of productivity. Employees can adapt to changes more rapidly if they get the proper training and develop the required skills.

II The shift from output to outcome

Ultimately, organizations must shift their mindset from simply measuring short-term **output** to evaluating **outcomes** that reflect long-term success.

By integrating these sustainable metrics, companies will better understand productivity, ensuring it is high today and remains high tomorrow.

So, the ultimate question is: how should we define productivity?

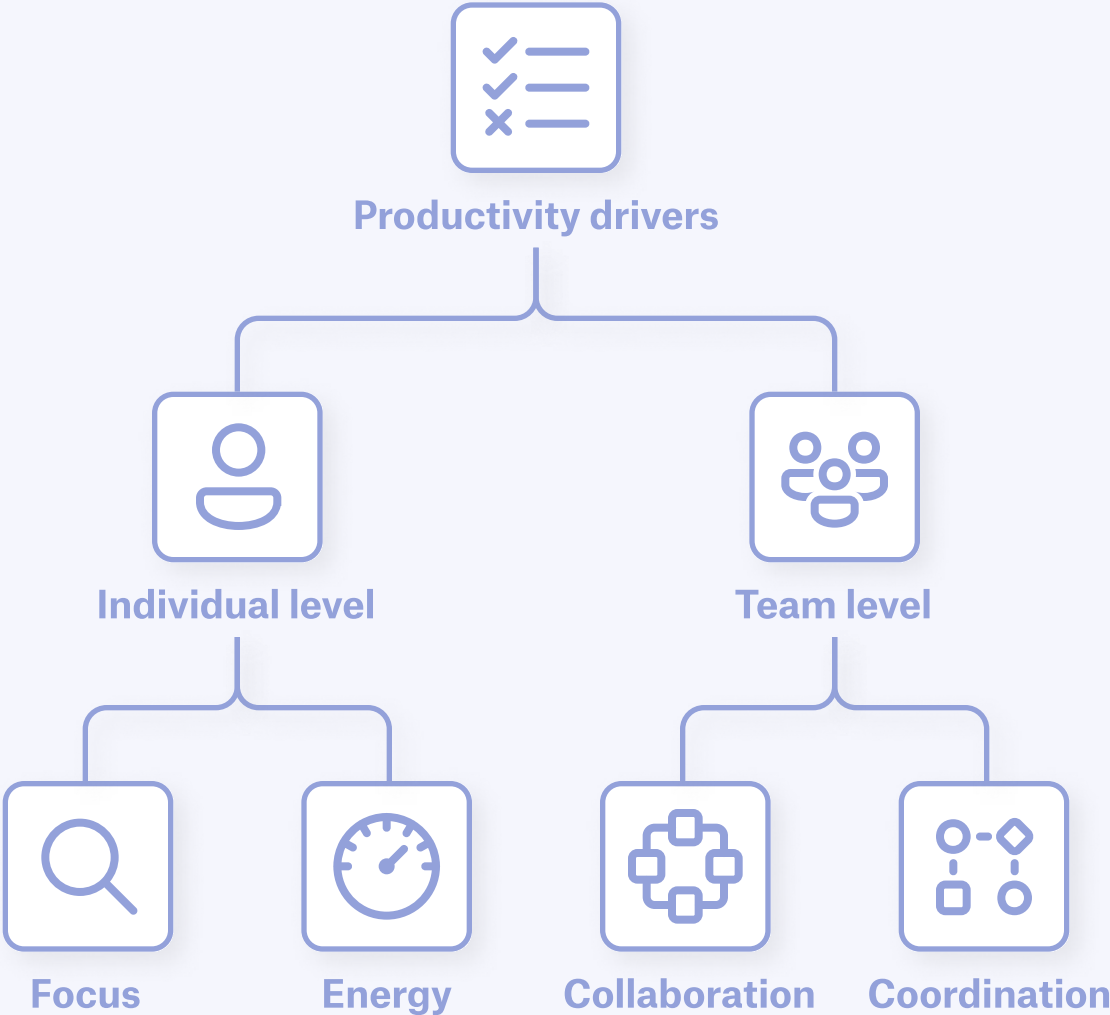
“I would define productivity as multi-faceted,” Harriet notes. “It includes the tactical components we currently measure, but we also need to account for sustainable productivity more consistently, which is dynamic and influenced by how people work and feel.”¹



¹ Redefining Productivity, HSM Advisory (2024)

The core drivers of hybrid work productivity

When it comes to hybrid work, Harriet distills the core drivers of productivity into four key areas²:

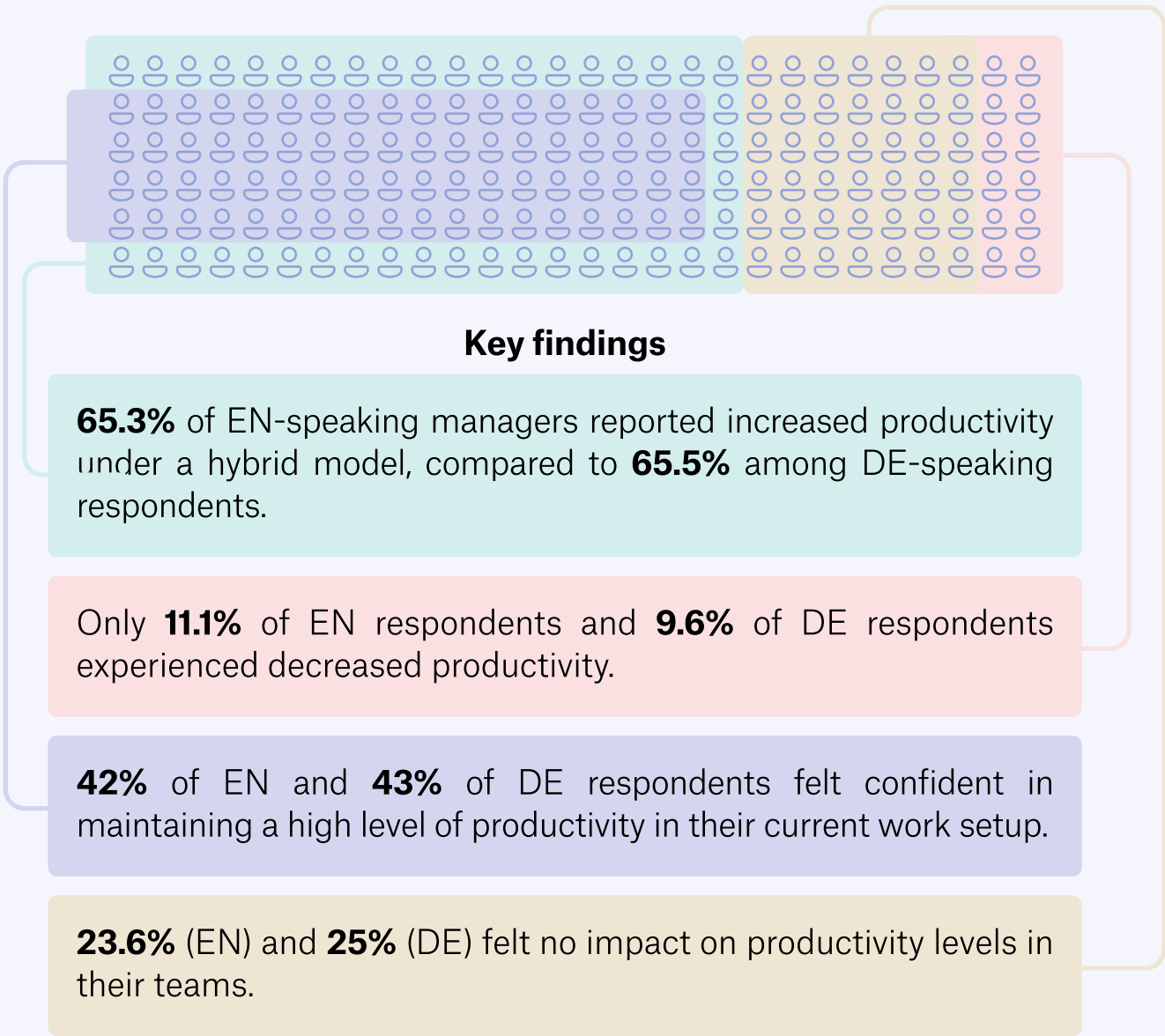


Significantly, Harriet points out that the primary unit of productivity lies at the **team level**, not the individual. This idea aligns with our internal survey, which explored how hybrid work models impact organizational productivity.

² Hybrid Work and Sustainable Change, HSM Advisory (2021)

deskbird’s survey results: hybrid work and productivity

In July, we surveyed over 250 managers from the DACH and EN-speaking regions to understand how they perceive productivity in their hybrid teams. The results provide a nuanced view, revealing both the gains and challenges associated with hybrid setups across various company sizes.



These statistics illustrate that while hybrid work boosts productivity for many, challenges remain for others. To better understand these challenges, we investigated the reasons behind decreased productivity.

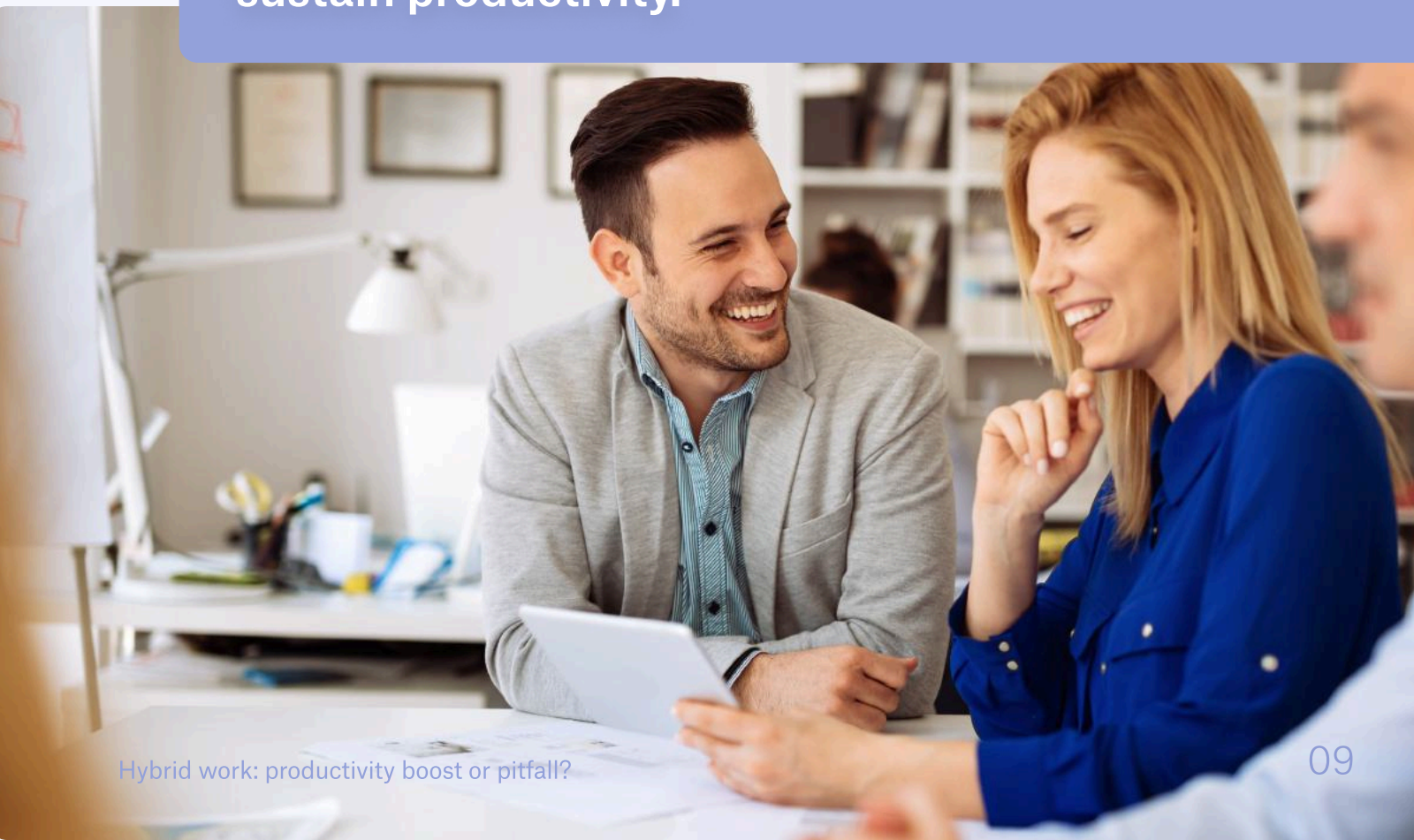
Challenges: the cost of flexibility

For the EN respondents who reported a drop in productivity, the primary issues were difficulties in **communication and collaboration** (27%), reduced **team cohesion, distractions at home**, and a **lack of supervision and accountability**.

In the DE survey, 30% of respondents identified **communication issues** as the main obstacle, while another 28% cited **managing workload** and **losing team spirit and morale**.

The persistence of these issues highlights the complexities of maintaining productivity in a dispersed work environment.

Organizations must implement robust strategies to address communication gaps, team morale, and remote work distractions if they wish to sustain productivity.



VI

Strategies for success in hybrid environments

In response to these challenges, organizations have adopted various strategies to maintain productivity in hybrid work setups:

- **Regular check-ins and meetings** were the most commonly used strategy for **EN** respondents, with **59%**, followed by **flexible work** schedules (**32%**) and the use of **project management tools** (**18%**).
- The most mentioned strategy for **DE** respondents was a **flexible work schedule** (**35%**). Other methods included using **project management tools** (**21%**) and **professional development opportunities** (**14%**).

However, **14% of DE** and **8% of EN** respondents reported that they had not implemented any new strategies—possibly signaling high confidence in their existing systems or, conversely, a risk of complacency.

VII

Benefits: flexibility, commute reduction, and autonomy

Despite the challenges, the benefits of hybrid work are undeniable.

In the EN survey, the top advantages include **better work-life balance (65%)** and **flexibility in work hours (68%)**, followed by **reduced commute time** and **increased productivity** (respectively 30% and 28%).

These advantages aren't merely conveniences but fundamental shifts that enhance job satisfaction and produce tangible productivity gains.

Similarly, DE respondents noted a **better work-life balance (66%)**, flexible work hours (33%), and reduced commute time (31%). They also mentioned increased focus and concentration for uninterrupted tasks as a significant benefit.



Both EN/DE large enterprises (over 1500 employees) and smaller companies (under 250 employees) highlighted the improvements in work-life balance as a critical benefit.

The productivity debate: perception vs. reality

As Harriet points out, “An interesting divide emerges when comparing the perspectives of employees versus those of executives on hybrid work productivity. Many executives believe people are less productive at home, while most employees feel more productive working remotely. This tension often leads organizations to scale back the flexibility they previously offered”.³

“What's also interesting about this focus on productivity and hybrid is that the pre-COVID, face-to-face workplace rarely measured productivity as rigorously as we are trying to do now,” Harriet continues.



“Nonetheless, hybrid faces an existential threat: flexibility will be increasingly curtailed if it doesn’t prove it can support productivity. And that would be disappointing - it's my view that

hybrid work with the right support systems in place can help productivity thrive.”

³ The Human Workplace, HSM Advisory, 2023

Strategic insights: enhancing productivity in a hybrid model

When asked for practical strategies to improve productivity, Harriet emphasizes three key points:

1

"My first piece of advice is always to think about the **design of your hybrid working environment** within the context of your organizational strategy and desired culture. Do you want to be highly innovative? Then your ways should reflect this."

2

"Secondly, don't underestimate the **complexity of running a hybrid program**. This is not a once-and-done situation; it will require ongoing management just as anything else does at work, from performance management to upskilling. This might range from workplace management to leadership alignment and storytelling."

3

"Finally – your **middle managers will be the golden thread** that keeps your hybrid working together. They should be on board with the program and—crucially—be able to have adult-to-adult conversations about the trade-offs of working flexibly as a team member."⁴

⁴ Hybrid Work and Sustainable Change, HSM Advisory (2021)

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Final thoughts: navigating the hybrid future

As businesses navigate the hybrid work model, the key to long-term success will be balancing productivity gains with addressing challenges like team cohesion, communication breakdowns, and employee morale. Research from McKinsey & Company shows that companies that focus on these elements—while refining their strategies to suit their teams’ evolving needs—will stand out as leaders in the future of work.

Ultimately, it's not just about boosting productivity; it's about fostering an environment where employees thrive mentally, emotionally, and professionally. Organizations that take proactive steps to improve communication, promote well-being, and invest in their teams will not only meet today's challenges but also set the gold standard for the future of work.

As Harriet concludes: “My view is that when done right,



..hybrid enables productivity to flourish.

I’m looking forward to organizations measuring **tactical** and **short-term** metrics and increasingly more sustainable **long-term human metrics**. This will create a rich data picture of how productivity shows up in their organization and is supported by hybrid.”

**Want to learn how to optimize
your hybrid office and avoid
productivity slumps?**

**Contact us today for a
free consultation with one
of our workplace experts!**



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