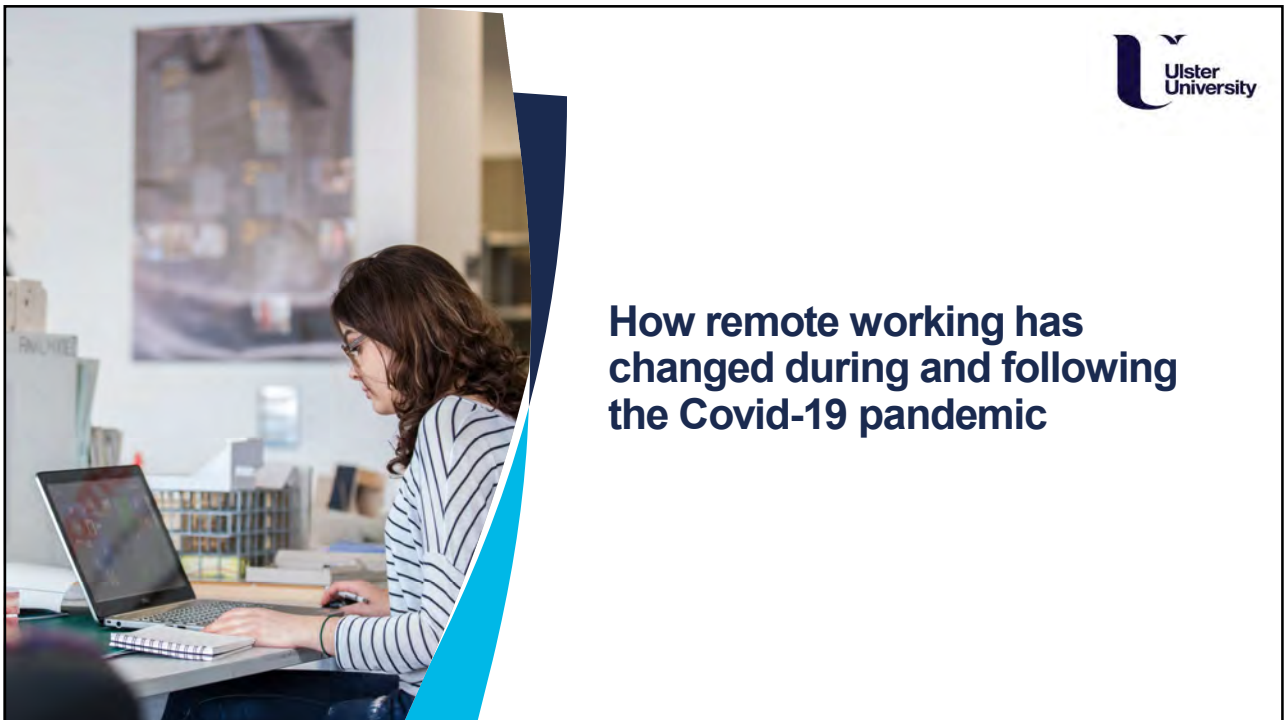




# Is remote working, working?

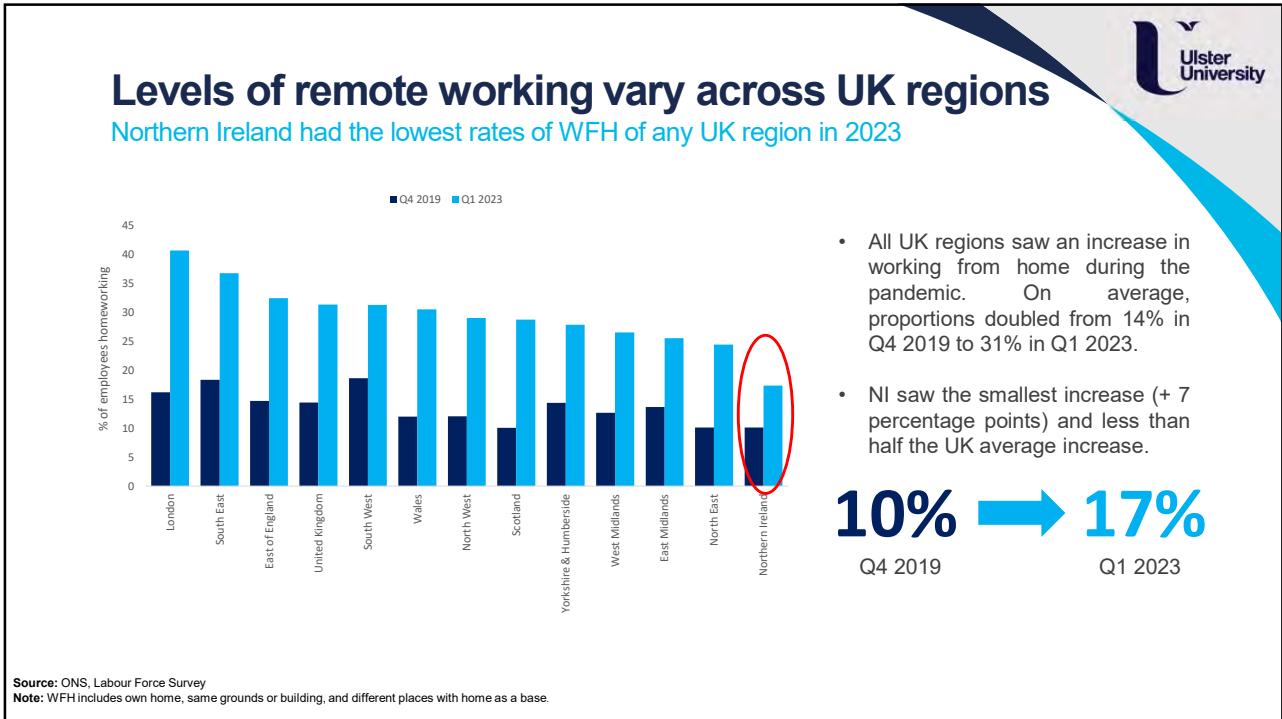
**Anastasia Desmond**  
**Senior Economist**  
**Ulster University Economic Policy Centre**

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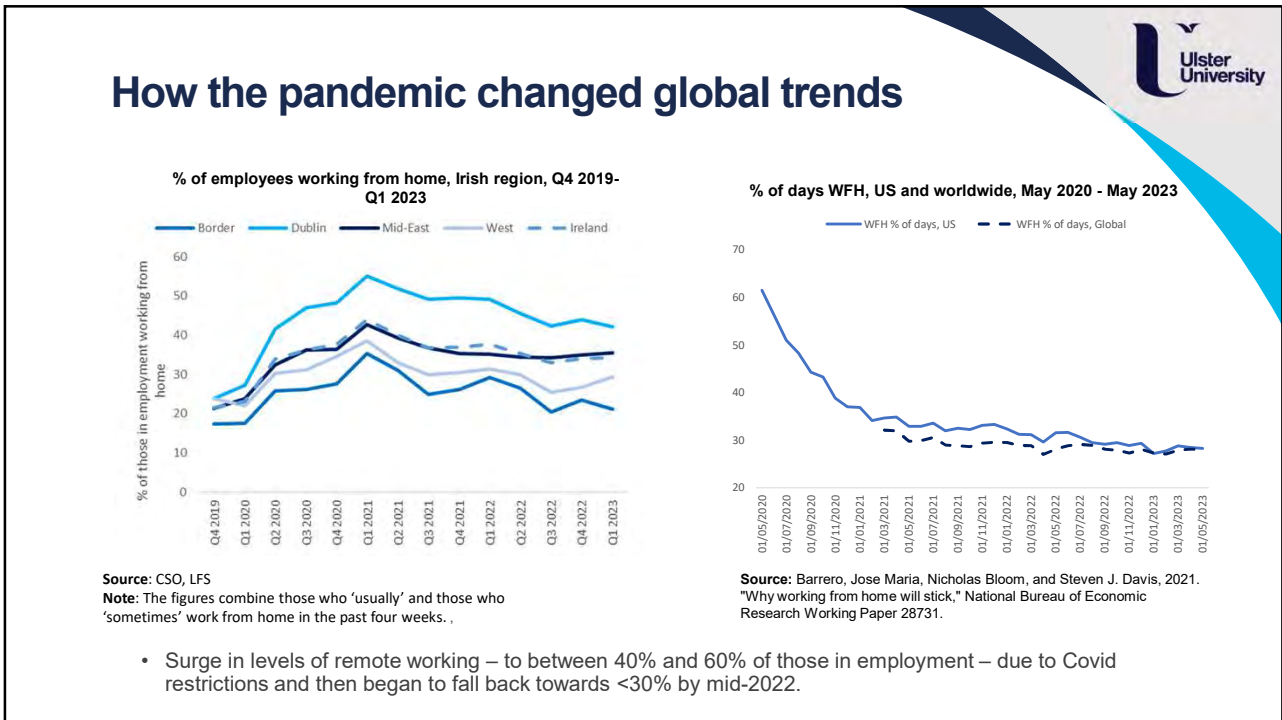


**How remote working has  
changed during and following  
the Covid-19 pandemic**

2



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## Who is working from home in 2023?

### Age

Younger people are least likely to work remotely under any working patterns. Hybrid working most popular in 35-44 age group, 65+ have largest % of fully remote.

### Qualifications

Statistical relationship found in 2021 NI census results between higher levels of qualifications and higher levels of remote working.

### Income

**Location of work for adult workers, by income, GB, Sep 2022 - Jan 2023**

Income bands (annual)	Homeworking only (%)	Hybrid working (%)	Travelled to work only, cannot homework (%)
Up to £10,000	~5	~15	~80
£10,000 up to £15,000	~10	~20	~70
£15,000 up to £20,000	~15	~25	~60
£20,000 up to £30,000	~20	~30	~50
£30,000 up to £40,000	~25	~35	~40
£40,000 up to £50,000	~30	~40	~30
£50,000 or more	~40	~45	~15

Clear correlation between the ability to work from home and income (Remote working is **not** an option for 72% of those earning <£15k compared to only 10% of those earning over £50k).

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)  
 Source: ONS, Labour Force Survey, Q4 2019 and Q1 2023  
 Note: WFH includes own home, same grounds or building, and different places with home as a base.



## Why the difference?

**Sectoral Composition**

The higher proportions of remote working naturally tend to be found in those sectors which are associated with a higher propensity for remote working such as ICT, Finance and Professional Services

**Management Practices**

Some managers have adapted to remote and hybrid working better than others, directly impacting the success of the new working pattern. Some will also have received more specific training than others

**Commuting Patterns**

When surveyed, employees often cite reduced commuting time as a key benefit of remote working. Global estimates of time saved commuting range from 120 minutes per week to 72 minutes per day

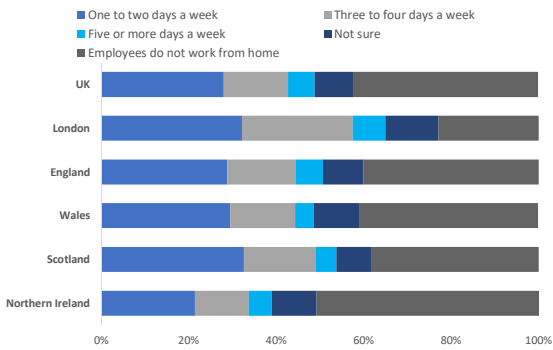
**Other**

Factors that have a strong influence on the extent to which remote working has been adopted, include: employee behaviour and job quality



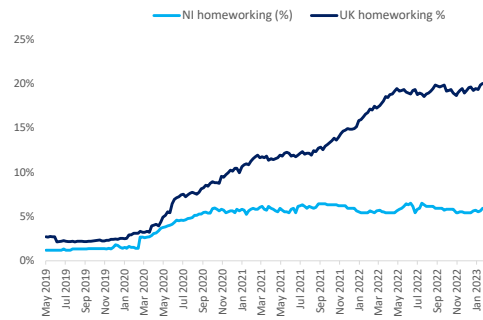
## NI businesses have embraced the remote model to a lesser extent than in other UK regions ...

How many days a week do your employees WFH?, Nov 22



Source: ONS, Business Insights and Conditions Survey, Wave 63

Online job adverts, % for homeworking, UK and NI, May 2019 – Jan 2023



Source: ONS, Online Job Adverts Estimates using Adzuna data; UUEPC analysis  
 Note: Adverts are de-duplicated the search terms.  
 Other data from Department for Economy (2022), using data from Burning Glass / Lightcast suggests similar levels for NI adverts for remote working in late 2021 and early 2022

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## Experiences of businesses across the UK

8



## Hybrid models for businesses

The number of days employees are in their workplace

Strictness of implementing the policy or framework - is it the same for all staff?

Who decides when and how often to 'be in' - line managers, senior staff or teams themselves?

For some the trade-off between flexibility and wider performance is still a work in progress.

*"In the past our best performers had some allowance about working outside the workplace or from home. This was not something everyone had access to. ... we now have a greater variety of staff working in a hybrid model, not all of them great performers."*

## Impacts to productivity

### Are Employers And Employees Measuring Productivity Differently?

<b>Employers</b>	<b>Employees</b>
<p>Mixed views on productivity increases/decreases. Overall view is that productivity remains unchanged</p>	<p>Significantly more belief in productivity increases when working remotely (this belief becomes stronger as remote working hours increase)</p>
<p>Most employers believed that their employees were producing work of a higher quality</p>	<p>Very small proportion believe in a decrease in productivity</p>
<p>Less likely to agree with employees in terms of efficiency/productivity increases</p>	<p>The same self-reporting patterns hold across age and gender groups</p>

## Ideas, collaboration and culture

Has collaboration & culture become more difficult?

*“With more staff working remotely it seemed like it got harder to ask for help and easier to ignore the request.”*

*“Much of our work is teamwork and this effort slumped when we were all remote. Our behaviour changed with very little brainstorming or adding to each other’s ideas.”*

*“Collaboration actually seemed to get lost in all the online communication – it was like a blizzard in 2021 until we worked to reduce it last year.”*

- There are mixed views on the impact the move to greater hybrid models from fully remote will have on collaboration, in particular the stronger tendency to work in silos when outside the workplace and behaviours around competing vs collaborating.

*“Our collaborative efforts have become more narrow, perhaps more focused but somehow lacking the dynamic nature we have when in person working, so hybrid needs to ensure quality time in work.”*

- Challenge to ‘cues’ such as workplace design or dress codes in a virtual environment – respondents were asked about how easy it was to (re)instil an understanding of the values of the business.

*“Its not like we have a company song each morning, but there are reminders about the company’s values within the office and we consistently refer to these in in-person meetings and discussions. Meeting clients in-person also helps with reinforcing who we are and what we do. All of that almost virtually disappeared and we have struggled to get it back among staff.”*

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## Tasks for different locations



### Consultees' views

- They believed that **managing staff**, developing a **team culture** and **team collaboration** were the three main management tasks which suffer most from working remotely.
- In contrast, a greater proportion believed that **focusing on specific tasks** was easier in a remote working environment e.g., exchange of ideas, meetings and communication online worked well.



### Employees' views

- The office was recognised as the best location for **building relationships** (62%) and **team collaboration** (45%).
- Only one task – **completion of specific jobs** – was perceived to be best done remotely.
- A majority of respondents considered that there was **‘no difference’** between remote working and office base on the effective management of staff, training and knowledge sharing.

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## Management practices and learning

How well have managers adapted to the new world of 'hybrid'?

- There was the issue of the 'blinkered boss' being blind-sided because they could not see their staff everyday and were not aware of what was happening in the workplace.
- Consultees were keen to emphasise how well **they** had adapted with several making the point that they had taken the opportunity to improve their techniques.

*"Once it became clear in 2021 that our business would not be returning to be in the office full-time, I began to look for training and mentoring about embracing managing a hybrid team and it has I think made me a better manager, more observant and looking to understand what drives my team."*

- However, this positive outcome was not the case for all management team members. Some line managers, in particular those with a more direct supervisory role, have found that increased levels of remote working has increased their workload and they have been left to work out this new world (Ipsen et al, 2022).

*"Our managers have been put in the firing line here, trying to manage in a situation they never expected or were trained for. Most would love for everything to revert back to 2019 ... I don't share that view, but I can see how it stresses those who do."*

- Secret desire to return to the office?

**Mindset matters!**



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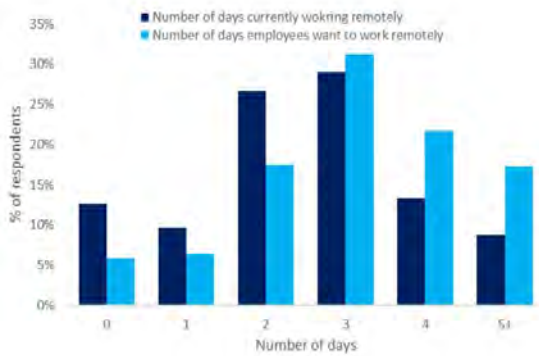


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## Findings from employees

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## Current working arrangements



Two to three days per week is the new norm for a majority (55%) of respondents.

If given the choice respondents would prefer three to four days per week (53%).

Only 9% work on a 'fully remote' basis but 17% would like to.

Source: UUEPC Survey, N=865

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## Employee satisfaction & current issues

**80%**

of employees are satisfied with their current working arrangements

### Issues leading to dissatisfaction

- Equity – where the policy is not being implemented consistently by all line managers across the organisation and/ or staff feel that the 'return to work' was not handled in the same way for all staff.
- Communication / Co-ordination – one respondent believed that their return was badly handled. *"We don't know why we are in, when others will be in and what this will look like in a month's time, never mind a year."*

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## Challenges of working remotely

### Top 2 issues when working remotely



“Always on” – lack of fixed working hours (27%)



Distractions at home (21%)

### Other factors



Internet speed/access (18%)



Inadequate workspace (17%)



Access to information/ resources (17%)

### No issues

45% had no issues with working remotely

Source: UUEPC employee survey, 2023  
Note: N = 776. Respondents could choose more than one option so does not round to 100%



## Key considerations for managers & company policy

## Employee experiences have changed



- Employee experiences during 2021 were very mixed. This was in part due to the restrictions of Covid-19 e.g. parents were juggling their work commitments with homeschooling their children and social restrictions left some people feeling more isolated and lonelier.
- This latest employee survey gives a more positive picture of remote working. The issues identified (illustrated in the chart on the left) are largely positive but also raises the need to give more consideration management style and practice.

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## Considerations for managers



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## How to make the office days “work”



- All respondents were asked what makes in office days “work”
  - Organised **collaboration** with colleagues
  - Retain the **flexibility** that remote working allows (e.g. ability to flex hours around caring responsibilities);
  - An **improved workplace environment** from comfortable workstations to environmental controls for temperature and light, more privacy/ quiet areas.
- Staff typically derive a benefit from the increased flexibility and therefore compensation (particularly financial) would be required if that benefit were to be removed.
- When asked what would voluntarily encourage them into the office more ideas such as healthy breakfasts/snacks and compensated commuting expenses were suggested

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## Maintaining equality

An issue at both the micro and macro levels



- **Research highlights a divide between 'hybrid haves' and 'hybrid have-nots':** Organisations employ staff across a range of occupations, some more suitable to remote/ hybrid working than others and therefore some staff may feel disadvantaged. This could be a particular issue in larger organisations, if different practices are applied in the same organisation across different teams, a sense of inequity could arise.
- **Managing transition to prevent invisibility and promotion/retention losses:** Extra effort must be made to ensure remote employees feel integrated with their team, particularly where some may be on-site more often than others. Employees have cited that there is an increased risk of being overlooked for promotion relative to more visible colleagues. Managers must ensure they treat employees equally regardless of work location if staff are operating within the terms of their employment contract.

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## Final Conclusions

### Informing next steps

23

## Final conclusions

### What can we learn to take forward

- **Hybrid working approaches will continue to evolve:** although remote/ hybrid working practices have changed significantly over the past three years, it will continue to evolve.
- **Making hybrid working, work:** the adoption of hybrid working practices has largely been influenced by the management styles of senior leaders. It tends to work well when employees have a clear understanding of their organisational needs and employers have a clear understanding of the benefits and flexibility a hybrid approach gives to their staff.
- **Earning the commute:** Employees and businesses alike are aware of the tasks best suited to the workplace and therefore it is important to create an environment where the 'days in' target those engagement, mentoring, collaborative and innovative tasks.
- **Ensuring equal opportunity:** management must recognise that remote/ hybrid workers need to maintain a level of visibility and integration with their colleagues to ensure they are not disadvantaged, for example in progression.

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## Contact Details

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Do you have the right environment for remote and hybrid working?



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2

GARY COOKSON

# HR FOR HYBRID WORKING

HOW TO ADAPT PEOPLE PRACTICES  
TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEES  
AND THE ORGANIZATION




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- Published June 2022
- Available to order from Amazon, Waterstones, Kogan Page and more ([www.koganpage.com/HRFORHW](http://www.koganpage.com/HRFORHW))
- Paperback and e-book editions £29.99

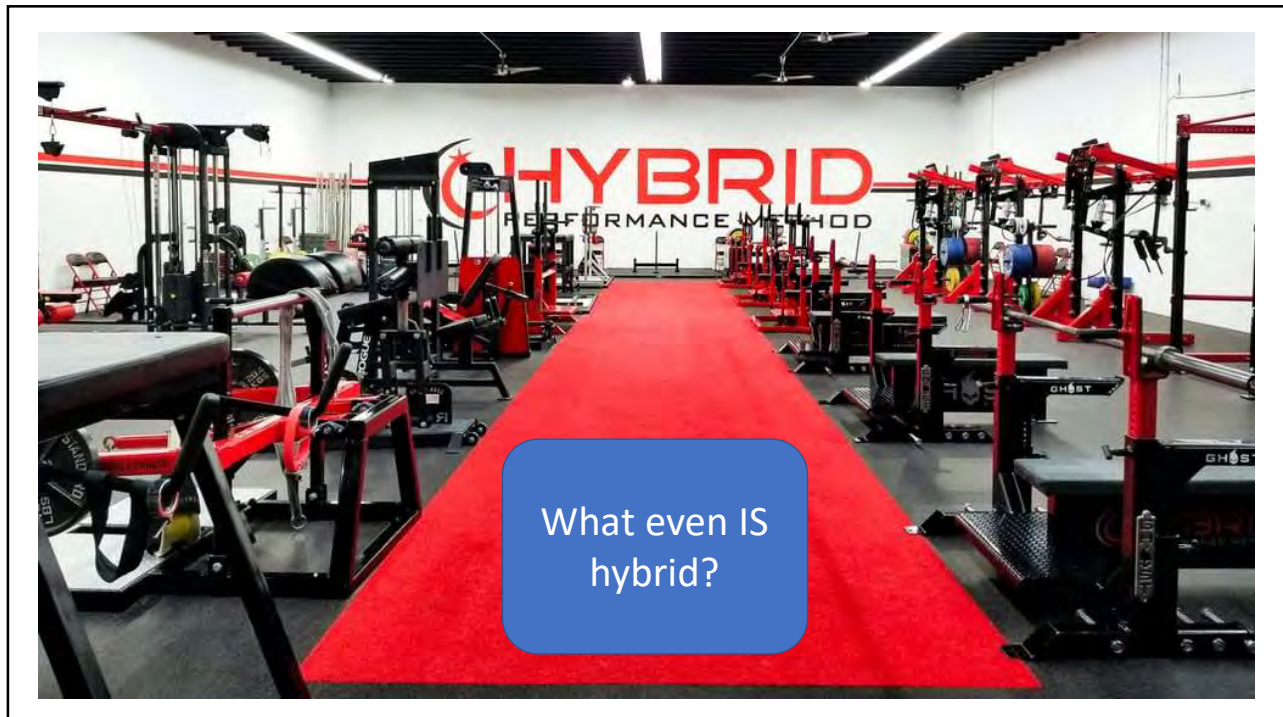
  

- 2<sup>nd</sup> book due mid-2024

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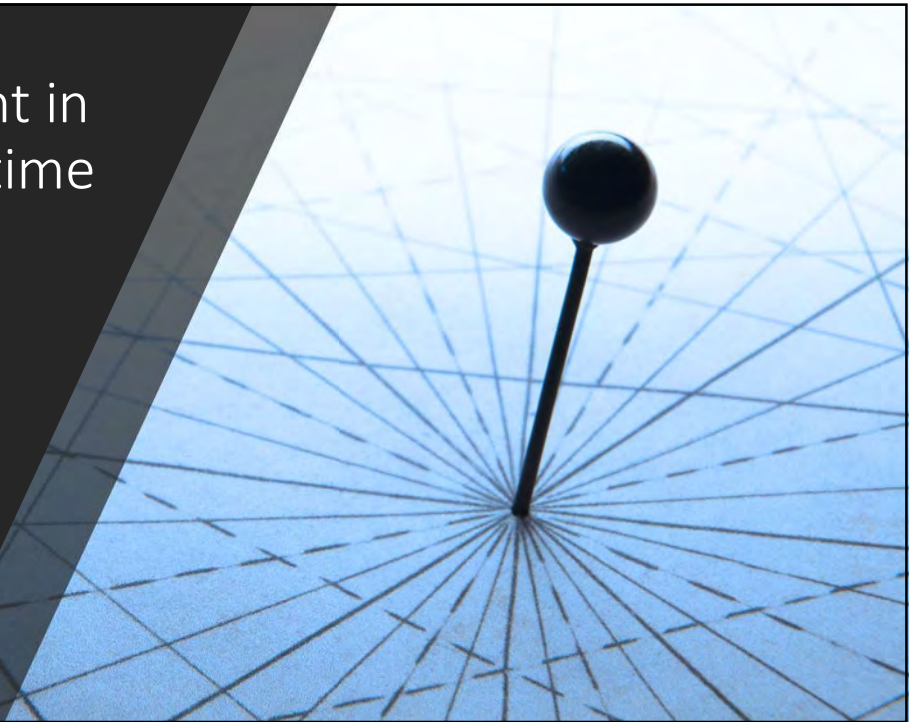
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A fixed point in  
space and time

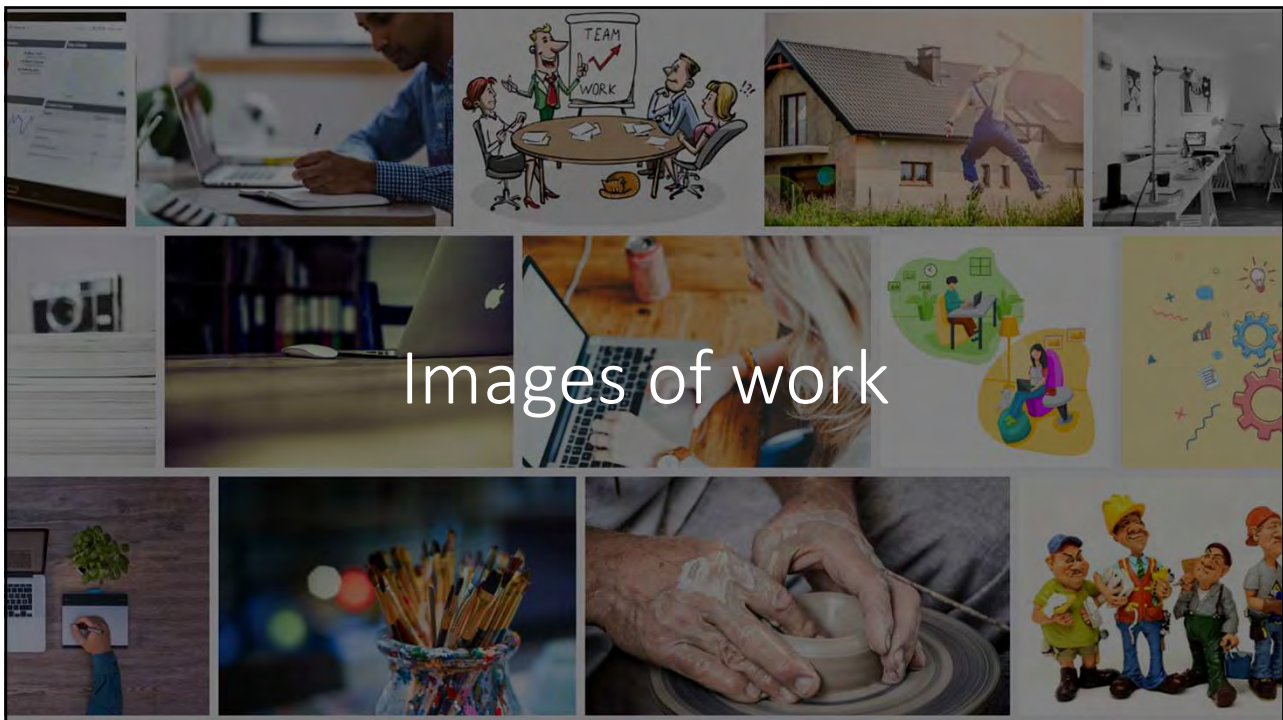


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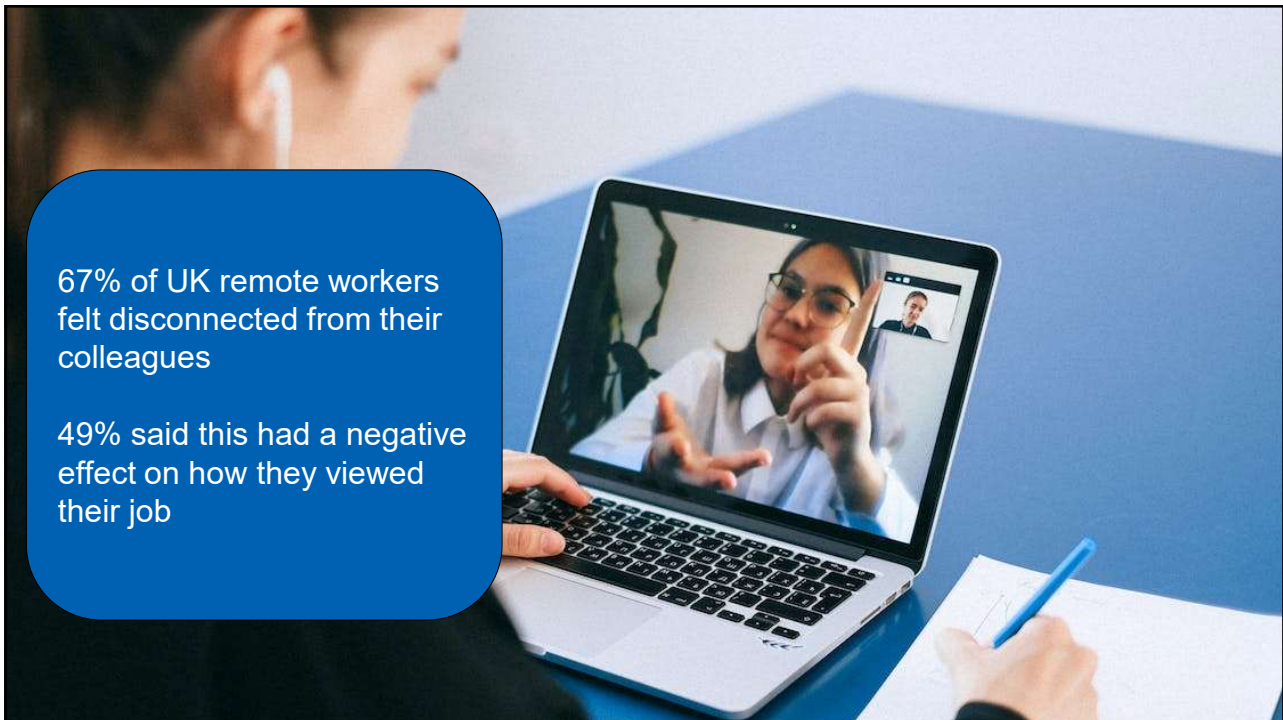
Can you  
compare?



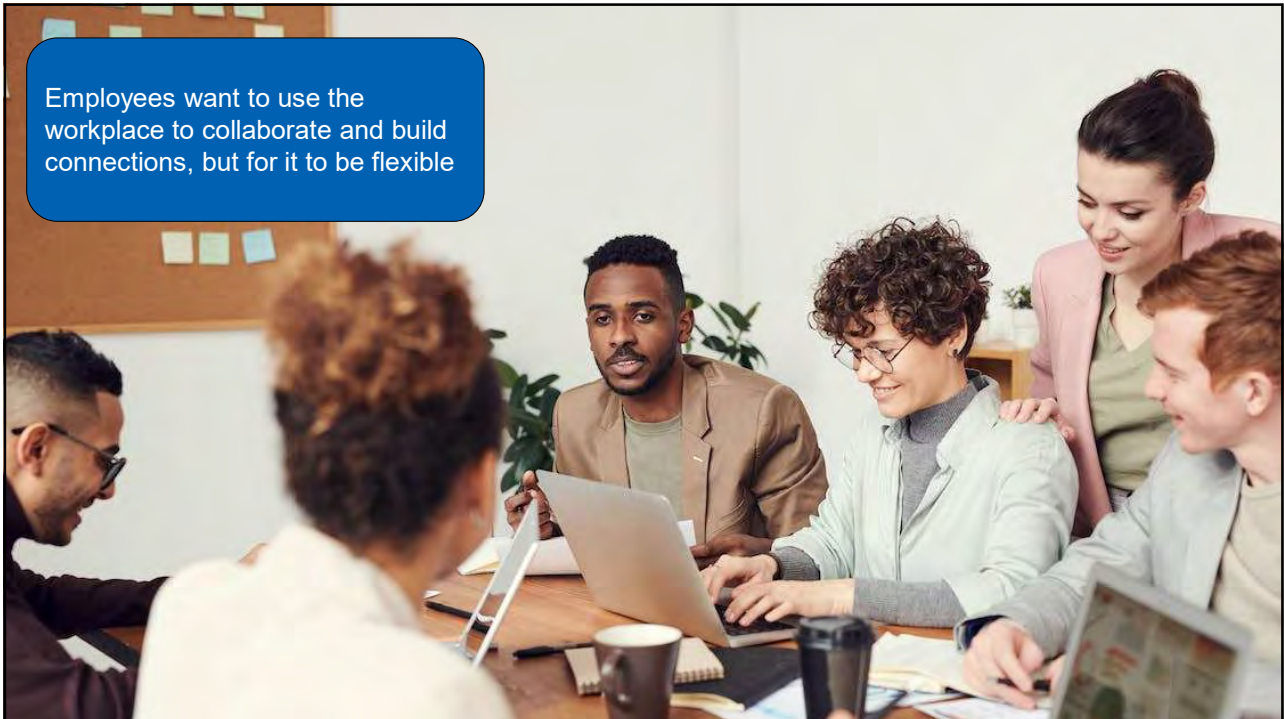
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Images of work







Employees want to use the workplace to collaborate and build connections, but for it to be flexible

9



UK employees prior to Covid-19:  
68% never WFH  
19% WFH some of the time  
13% WFH the whole time

UK employees after Covid-19:  
91% want to WFH at least some of the time  
9% never want to WFH again

10



## Gallup's Global Workforce Survey 2023

- 23% of employees are engaged
- 59% are emotionally detached
- 18% are downright miserable





11

		When must the task be done?	
		Synchronously with other people Onsite in a fixed location	Asynchronously at any suitable time Onsite in a fixed location
Where must the task be done?	Synchronously with other people Onsite in a fixed location	Synchronously with other people Onsite in a fixed location	Asynchronously at any suitable time Onsite in a fixed location
	Synchronously with other people Any suitable location	Synchronously with other people Any suitable location	Asynchronously at any suitable time Any suitable location

Form follows  
function...?

12





## Some questions to ask

- Can we change where it needs to be done?
- Can we change when it needs to be done?
- Can we change how it needs to be done?
- Can we change who it needs to be done by?
- Can we outsource it?
- Can we move it to another team?
- Can we automate it?
- Can we stop doing it?

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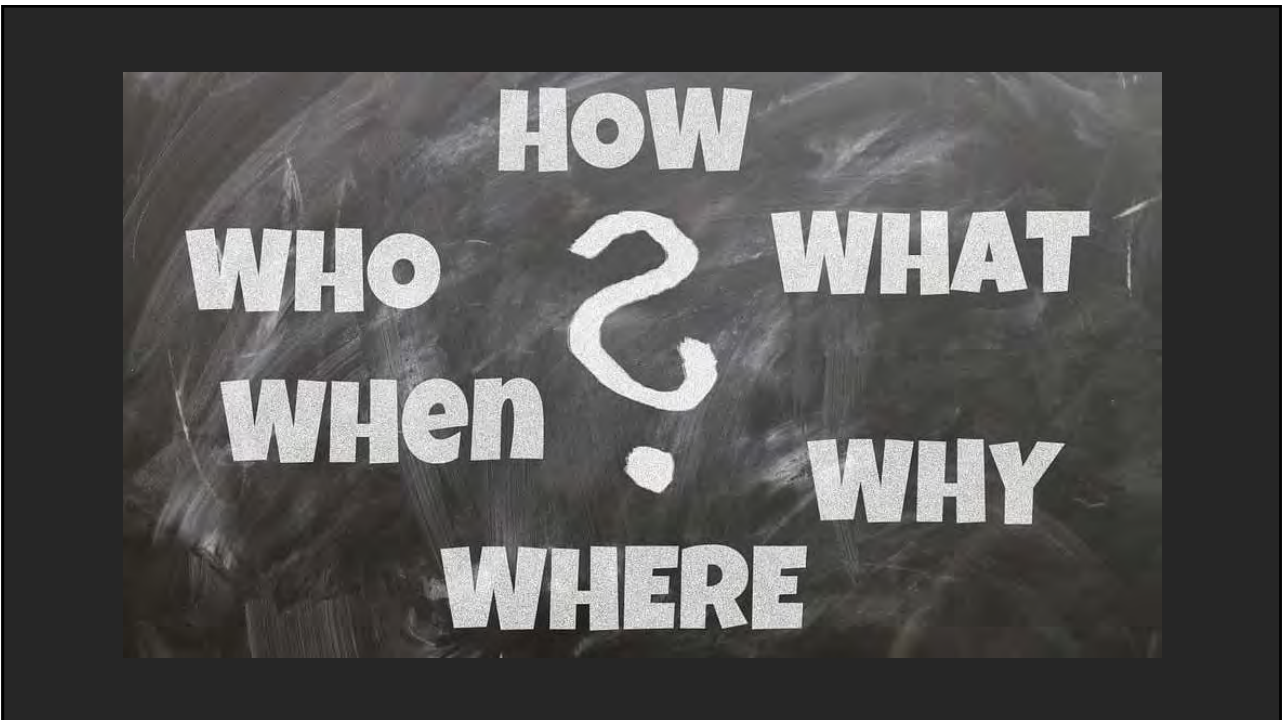


## Jobs that can't possibly be hybrid

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What works best for you? Either of these or something else?



17



More like this...?

---

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## Types of workspaces

		What type of work is taking place?
Where the work is taking place?	Synchronous (fixed time) work, in the physical workplace = <b>Flexible spaces</b> <b>Fixed settings</b>	Asynchronous (any time) work, in the physical workplace = <b>Touchdown spaces</b> <b>Hotdesking spaces</b> <b>Flexible spaces</b> <b>Library-type spaces</b>
	Synchronous (fixed time) work, remote and online = <b>Fixed settings (at home)</b> <b>Flexible spaces (at home)</b>	Asynchronous (any time) work, remote and online = <b>Flexible spaces (at home)</b> <b>Library-type spaces (at home)</b>

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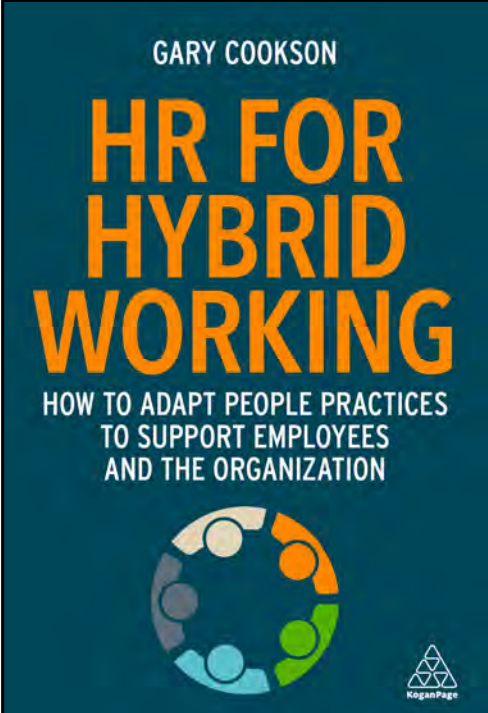
“(remote and hybrid) work doesn’t kill organisational culture.

It reveals it.”

*Chris Herd, 2023*

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GARY COOKSON

# HR FOR HYBRID WORKING

HOW TO ADAPT PEOPLE PRACTICES TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEES AND THE ORGANIZATION


Kogan Page



## Questions?

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## Considerations

- Why?
  - Security
  - Autonomy
  - Fairness
  - Esteem
  - Trust
  - You
- Flexible working



2

## Hybrid working practical provisions

- Legal implications
- Insurance requirements
- Data protection and confidentiality
- Overseas working
- Mileage and travel expenses
- Health and safety
- Risk assessments
- Technology and equipment

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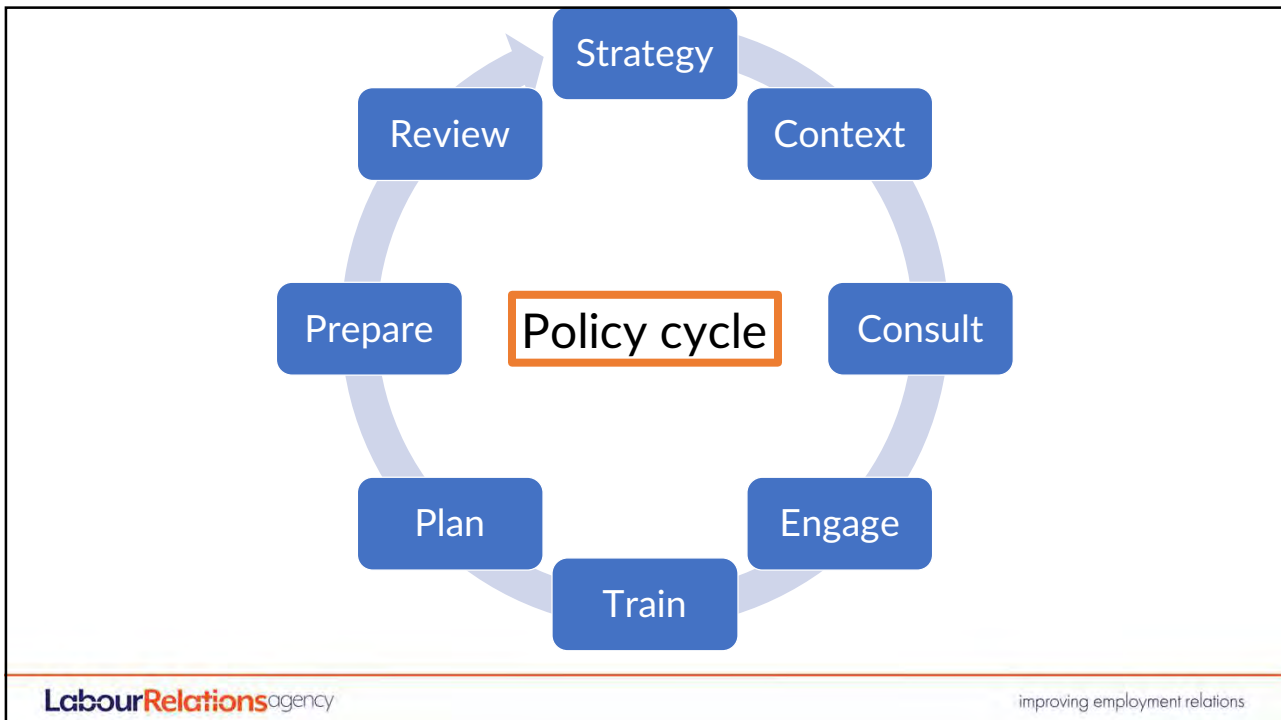
## Hybrid working “people” provisions

- Flexible working
- Wellbeing
- Communication and consultation
- Training and development
- Performance management
- Fairness and inclusion
- Employee career lifecycle

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## Resources

Website: [www.lra.org.uk](http://www.lra.org.uk)

A Practical Guide to Hybrid Working

Hybrid Working webinar

Workplace Information Service 03300 555300

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