

Reconfiguring Digital Embeddedness in Hybrid Work: The Case of Employee Experience Management Platforms

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Abstract

As organisations respond to the increasing preference for hybrid work, employee experience management (EXM) platforms are becoming integral to transforming employees' experiences in hybrid workplaces. In this paper we theorize that EXM platforms are implanted into the workflow through digital embeddedness, which is appropriated and reconfigured through the interactions between human and digital subsystems in hybrid work. We adopt the lens of digital/human interaction to explore the reciprocal process of how EXM platforms configure and are reconfigured in hybrid work. Based on a case study of Microsoft Viva, an AI-based EXM platform, we propose a conceptual model that identifies two dimensions of digital embeddedness: digital/human embeddedness and digital/workplace embeddedness. The study contributes to a theoretical understanding of digital embeddedness as a dynamic process whilst also showing the reconfiguration of hybrid work practices evidences a joint optimization. The study further contributes insights into how hybrid work, which resulted from the enforced remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, continues to emerge due to the digital embeddedness of EXM platforms in the flow of hybrid work.

Keywords: hybrid work, embeddedness, digital/human configurations, employee experience platform, Microsoft Viva.

Introduction

Hybrid work has received overwhelming attention from academics and practitioners (Sonjit, Dacre, & Baxter, 2021; Zamani & Spanaki, 2023). This form of workplace transformation, though not new, has gained increased popularity since the COVID-19 pandemic with reports showing that most of white-collar employees have a preference for this form of work (Gratton, 2021; Gallup, 2022). This paper examines the relational association between hybrid work and digitalisation. In the era of digitalisation, hybrid work experiences are influenced by advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI), work analytics and other augmented technologies. Employee experience management (EXM) platforms constitute a notable example of workplace technologies with intelligent augmentation (Abhari, Bhullar, Le, & Sufi, 2023). EXM platforms use AI and people analytics by applying predictive modelling to people data. Such platforms aim to boost employee performance and engagement by enhancing employer–employee relationships, monitoring employees’ sentiment and facilitating employees’ personal and professional development (Abhari, Ly, Sanavi, & Wright, 2021; Carroll, Bernal, Bhullar, & Abhari, 2022; John, Alsamarra’i, & Panteli, 2022).

With the growing popularity of both hybrid work (Dowling, Goldstein, Park, & Price, 2022) and EXM platforms (Walsh & Volini, 2017), there is a need to theorise the foundation of the relationship between humans and technology in crafting the modern employee experience in hybrid work. By conceptualising the effects of EXM platforms on the changes in the work patterns and by relating them to the emergence of new types of work arrangement that is shaped by the use and appropriation of EXM platforms, we argue for a dynamic and evolutionary theoretical view to better recognise the mutual shaping between digital and human aspects of work in organisations facilitated by EXM platforms in hybrid work. Our theorisation of such appropriation is influenced by Suchman’s (2012) configuration lens. Therein, configuration seeks to examine how humans and technologies are influencing each other in the

form of shaping and re-shaping each other. Drawing on this lens, the study aims to explore how EXM platforms coevolve with employees and managers in the hybrid workplace and how the human and digital subsystems work together to enable further configuration of hybrid work practices. Hence, the research question addressed in this study is:

How do EXM platforms and hybrid work influence each other?

To answer this question, we explore how employee experience is captured in the workflow by embedding an EXM platform in the fabric of digital work and enabling the reconfiguration of hybrid work. The study draws from the case of a multinational high-tech organisation that adopted a hybrid work model following the pandemic. Using a qualitative study, we studied the reconfiguration of hybrid work and the role of EXM platforms.

This study contributes to a theoretical and practical understanding of how EXM platforms configure emerging hybrid work practices and enhance employee experience. At the theoretical level, our proposed conceptual model of digital embeddedness reveals two types of EXM-related digital embeddedness: digital/human embeddedness and digital/workplace embeddedness. The model also unpacks the dynamic and reciprocal interactions between the human and digital subsystems of hybrid work through the processes of adaptation, transformation and reconfiguration, which are responsible for the further configuration of hybrid work practices. This understanding explains how the human and digital subsystems shape EXM platforms and further contribute to developing new work norms and practices that continue to shape hybrid work. At a practical level, this insight can be adopted by organisations to inform the design of EXM platforms and their capabilities so that they are better aligned with the evolving nature of hybrid work and to enrich their employees' experience regardless of their work location.

In what follows, we review the literature on hybrid work, the challenges experienced by employees and the role of EXM platforms in hybrid work settings. We then develop the

theoretical foundations of the study by drawing on the theory of embeddedness and the digital/human configuration lens. The empirical setting of the study is then presented, and the methodology adopted is explained.

Hybrid work: An employee experience perspective

The enforced remote work caused by the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated hybrid work towards the future of post-pandemic work practices (Verma, Venkatesan, Kumar, & Verma, 2023). According to Mandviwalla et al. (2021), remote work has proven successful, with the notion of the place to work becoming a voluntary choice of employees' post-pandemic. While some employees return to the in-person work environment, others continue to work remotely in a hybrid model, though variations exist within this model (Spataro, 2022). As such, employees across a range of organisations and industries have the flexibility to work from anywhere and work asynchronously with their team under this model (Zamani & Spanaki, 2023). This flexibility is becoming a determining factor for employees in terms of their intention to stay in their job. Hybrid work can be an effective way to attract and retain employees, as it allows for a better work–life balance and can also lead to increased productivity (Hooijberg & Watkins, 2021). Nevertheless, as the flexibility and autonomy of hybrid work are often seen as benefits for employees, increased working hours, burnout, blurred work–life divide and lacking social interactions are reported as challenges experienced by employees (Rahrovani, 2020; Hooijberg & Watkins, 2021).

Workplace technologies commonly used in organisations with virtual, remote or hybrid work include productivity software, such as Microsoft Office or Google workspace, communication tools (e.g., email, instant messaging), project management software, such as Trello, and many more. These technologies were initially used to support the office work of employees, but they have since evolved into the basis for social interactions and community building in organisations. More recently, they have performed managerial roles using advanced

AI capabilities. As presented by Baptista et al., (2020), there is a progressive layering of workplace technologies within organisations from early workplace technologies based on the first layer of individual office applications, the second layer of collaboration platforms and social media and the third layer of advanced workplace technologies that add AI, cognitive knowledge, and collaboration systems to an integrated digital platform of work termed as intelligent augmentation layer. EXM platforms are examples of this third layer of advanced workplace technologies introduced in hybrid work settings.

With the evolution of workplace technologies in the hybrid work, Boccoli, Gastaldi, and Corso, (2023) underscore the fact that there is a need to re-think employee experience in the new hybrid work. Plaskoff (2017) defined employee experience as *'the employee's holistic perceptions of the relationship with his/her employing organisation derived from all the encounters at touchpoints along the employee's journey'* (p. 137). Malik, Budhwar, Mohan and Srikanth (2022) stated that there are a multitude of stimuli in terms of employee's reactions and responses that can be captured from diverse sources in the hybrid work environment. Capturing this multitude of stimuli from both work and non-work life in a hybrid work environment and measuring employee experience is a complicated task experienced by leaders and organisations today. Thus, comprehending employee experiences that are conceptualised based on the extent, nature and relevance of stimuli employees receive in the hybrid work, needs more theorisation.

Embeddedness, EXM platforms and hybrid work

We draw upon the concept of embeddedness to show the connectedness between EXM platforms and hybrid work. In broad terms, embeddedness refers to the phenomenon in which one entity becomes deeply connected to another entity. Traditionally, embeddedness has been studied in the fields of economics and banking, but studies have also shown the relevance of embeddedness in intra-organisational work relationships (Frankowska, 2020; Halinen &

Törnroos, 1998), social embeddedness and job performance (Van Emmerik & Sanders, 2004), job embeddedness and employee turnover (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001), structural embeddedness and organisational networks (Pavlovich & Kearins, 2004), workgroup embeddedness (Dinger, Thatcher, Grover, & Tripp, 2022) and other types where the focus is not largely on technological tools. Research in human resource management suggests that job embeddedness results from internal and external forces entangling employees in specific social fields or professional contexts (Lee et al., 2004; Mitchell et al., 2001) with studies showing that employees with higher levels of job embeddedness experience low job turnover (Lee et al., 2004).

Within information systems (IS) research, Agterberg, Van Den Hooff et al. (2010) studied different types of embeddedness in the online community context, positing that content and connection-related factors contribute to remote workers' sense of embeddedness within their globally dispersed organisation. More recently, Dinger et al. (2022) examined embeddedness among the workforce in the IT industry and how this shapes IT professionals' experiences. Their study showed workgroup embeddedness, which they presented as a form of organisational embeddedness, focusing on how an individual professional may become embedded among peers in a specific workgroup, team or function. On the other side, system embeddedness is defined as the extent to which an information system is an integral part of organisational activity (Furneaux & Wade, 2011). Krijestorac, Garg and Konana (2017) introduced digital embeddedness as the extent to which information from digital sources is integral to an individual's decision-making process. However, none of these studies has explored the level of embeddedness of an AI-based EXM platform in the fabric of digital work to enable a better employee experience by improving employee engagement and wellbeing. Batat (2022) strongly posits that the employee experience and its relationship to a person's well-being remains insufficiently understood despite its practical and theoretical relevance.

Accordingly, we propose that with the introduction of EXM platforms, workplace transformation in hybrid workplaces demonstrates the emergence of digital embeddedness in the workplace. We view this type of embeddedness as the process in which technology is embedded in the workplace to capture its employees' experience and digital workplace transformation. In what follows, we explore how the connections between social and technical contributes to this type of embeddedness.

Digital/human configuration and socio-technical reversal

The growth of digitalisation in organisations and the popularity of digitalised workplaces has raised researchers' interest in the relational association between humans and technology. Researchers have called for a re-examination of '*what we have uncovered in the past, rethinking its implications, and leveraging it anew*' (Burton-Jones, 2014, p. 42). As argued by Sarker et al. (2019), there is a need '*to attend to unique ways of connecting the social and the technical*' as we experience the evolving and emerging configuration of digital workplace technologies. Our examination of digital configuration work is prompted by the need to understand how users' actions and interactions shape how technology is used in the emerging digital workplaces. We draw on Suchman and Suchman (2007) and Suchman's (2012) notion of configuration to investigate the appropriation of EXM platforms within hybrid work.

Suchman (2012, p. 56) argued that configuration is necessary due to the '*contingency and incompleteness of the artifacts*'. Configuration has been described as a method assemblage through which socio-technical artefacts emerge from the enactment exercised by human agency (Suchman, 2012). This enactment is both contingent on the situation as well as generative and transformative depicting a dynamic and evolving character. Drawing on the socio-technical perspective, configuration work is conceptualised as the phenomenon where '*how humans and machines are figured together—or configured—in contemporary technological discourses and*

practices and how they might be reconfigured, or figured together, differently' (Suchman, 2012, p. 49).

The notion of digital/human configuration work designates design-in-use practices as critical human work. The human worker puts the technology in place, makes sense of it in the context of their practices and, in doing so, their work and identity are shaped by the technology. Configuration, thus, denotes both the dynamics of arranging human-technology work and the mutual shaping of humans and technology (Richter, Heinrich, Stocker, & Schwabe, 2018). As Klein and Watson-Manheim (2021, p. 2) quoted, '*digital configuration work requires human agency, innovation, and imagination in making sense of technologies and configuring (and reconfiguring) knowledge, discourses, and practices.*' Configuration work is fundamentally a cognitive analysis involving human intuition, perception and expertise. With the introduction of any technology in the workplace, it is to be expected that practices will be altered. It will involve significant preparation work and cognitive labour. Individuals must be attentive to possibilities, anticipating potential paths and options for practices of the specific technology that enables new configurations between humans and technology (Suchman, 2012; Suchman & Suchman, 2007).

Configuration work is material, social, political, economic, and psychological. It involves shaping, adjusting and redesigning the contexts in which technology is becoming embedded. Baptista et al., (2020) clearly present a layered evolution of digital/human configuration with new workplace technologies and their progressively more transformational effects in the workplace. They state that the emergence of new human/digital work result in digital having an unprecedented role while human effort and endeavour is even more critical. Configuration work involves analysing the materiality of the technology in its specific setting and configuring and reconfiguring the practices in that context (Klein & Watson-Manheim, 2021). Baptista et al., (2020) presents this configuration in three states by considering

individuals' understanding and interpretations of their work and complex societal transformations. The configuration and reconfiguration of work lead to new and expanded competencies, skills and expertise, which all rely on human agency (Neff & Nagy, 2018; Suchman, 2012). However, despite its dynamic role, configuration work is often unrecognised and invisible to stakeholders, including human actors (Klein & Watson-Manheim, 2021).

Recent studies on socio-technical reversal (Lyytinen, Nickerson, & King, 2021) reinforce the relational association between the digital and human. The ontological reversal of digital first suggest that human experiences are shaping and are shaped by physical and digital realities (Baskerville, Myers, & Yoo, 2020). The digital reality is represented and reflected in the physical world. In a socio-technical systems, the social/human part of work is preconstructed by digital technology and it is the data and insights revealed by the technology that frames how humans react and respond. As social and technical subsystems are configured as a whole socio-technical system, both subsystems are equally important focusing on economic outcomes such as profit and efficiency and humanistic outcomes, such as engagement and well-being (Fischer et al., 2023). In today's AI-enabled hybrid work, datafication of our digital work is continuously performed at the backend, by integrating, analyzing, and visualizing quantifiable work for monitoring, optimization, and predictive analysis (Fischer & Wunderlich, 2021). The emerging complex human and technology collaborations in digital workplaces are beyond task substitution, augmentation, and assemblage (Rai, Constantinides, & Sarker, 2019). The real-time datafication of digital work captured by EXM platforms can transform the role and nature of workplace technologies beyond having an instrumental or supporting role to being more agile and adaptive. Thus, we propose that a constantly renewing reality from socio-technical changes evidenced by the level of digital embeddedness in hybrid work and the role of EXM platforms in employees' digital work might evidence underlying beliefs of recent socio-technical reversal theory of how AI

and humans co-evolve at the workplace. Therefore, there is a need to explore the level of embeddedness of EXM platforms in hybrid work and understand how EXM platforms impact employees' experiences and disrupt established work patterns and structures in organisations. Some research exists that suggests employees adapt reactively to their datafied work environment. Datafication of digital work by EXM platforms is expected to decrease work complexity for employees as they learn from it, while algorithms are more agile at adapting to changing environments through generative and live updating data (Fischer & Baskerville, 2022). Earlier studies have evidenced in varying degrees how the human privilege of work autonomy is altered by the degree and causal direction of algorithmic agency (Benlian et al., 2022; Schuetz & Venkatesh, 2020).

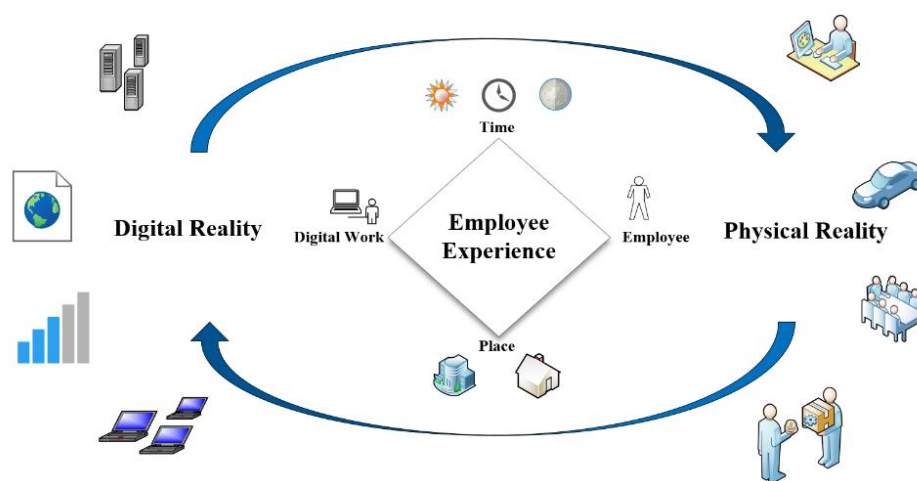


Figure 1: Employee experiences in a digital-first world (Baskerville et al., 2020).

Thus, capturing employee experience in hybrid work in a digital work environment aligns with computing human experiences in a digital-first world, as presented by Baskerville et al. (2020), and it depends on four dimensions of lived human experiences of digital technology listed as time, place, artifacts and actors, as presented in Figure 1. To understand how hybrid work practices are being configured, we carried out a study of an organisation that adopted hybrid work following the enforced remote work due to the pandemic as detailed in the next section.

Research Methodology

Our study adopted a qualitative exploratory approach with a single in-depth case study research design. A qualitative approach allows for the study of a phenomenon in the setting and context in which it is observed (Creswell, 2014; Gillham, 2000; Yin 1994) and is therefore characterised as being context-sensitive. Context here can be geographical, cultural, organizational or human characteristics, all of which need to be recognised and made explicit when designing research and analysing and interpreting findings (Davison & Martinsons, 2016; Fernandez, 2016). In our case, as we revisit the foundation of the relationship between humans and technology and how they are shaping and reshaping each other, we do so in the context of hybrid work settings that gained popularity following the COVID-19 pandemic and with focus on the employee experience and the use of an employee experience technological tool – EXM platform.

Further, our study adopts an interpretive paradigm, founded on the ontological view that reality is subjective in nature (Darke et al., 1998) and is socially constructed and we come to an understanding through the intersubjective interpretation of the empirical reality by the researchers and what it means to the people observed (Lee, 1991; McWilliam et al., 2009). Within qualitative research with an interpretive paradigm, several research designs are relevant, including case study design. When seeking an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, in this case, how a technological tool like an EXM platforms and hybrid work influence each other, a case study design is appropriate; this method can provide a rich understanding of phenomena and derive new concepts and conceptual frameworks (Walsham, 1995). In what follow, we provide further details about the case study including study context, data sources, data collection and data analysis methods adopted.

Case Study and Research Method

The case study is based on a multinational organisation called Alfa (pseudonym for the organisation), with more than 2000 employees in Australia, where hybrid work after the pandemic became popular among employees. The study was set out to understand the participants' work arrangements before, during and after COVID-19. This allowed us to follow the changes in the work configuration of employees prior to, during and after COVID-19, and to understand how these changes have shaped the EXM platform under study Microsoft Viva. Participants were selected as the employees responded to our call for participation. Data collection took place through a series of semi-structured interviews with managers and employees across a range of departments and seniorities in the Australia/New Zealand (ANZ) region of Alfa.

A total of 30 participants (15 females and 15 males) participated in the interviewing process which took place from December 2021 to July 2023. A total of 8 participants were interviewed in late 2021; 19 participants in 2022; and 3 participants in early-mid 2023. The participants' role profiles included 10 managers and 20 employees. Roles varied from solution architects, engineers, networking specialists, experience product managers and others, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 *Study Participants Summary*

Participant	Interview Date	Position Title	Work Experience
ICT1	Dec 2021	Networking specialist	4.5 years
ICB2	Dec 2021	Communications executive	3 years
ICT3	Dec 2021	Architect	1 month
ICT4	Dec 2021	Principal consultant	10 years
P5	Dec 2021	Corporate communications director	4 years
ICB6	Dec 2021	Product marketing manager	1 year
P7	Dec 2021	Digital sales leader	21 years

ICB8	Dec 2021	Marketing operations team	10 months
ICB9	Feb 2022	Partner account manager	10 years
P10	Feb 2022	General manager	5 years
ICB11	May 2022	Senior consultant	4 months
P12	May 2022	Engineer	28 years
ICB13	May 2022	Senior HR business partner	8 months
ICB14	Aug 2022	Global specialist employee experience	5 years
P15	Aug 2022	Business group manager	19 years
ICB16	Aug 2022	Technology strategist	14 years
P17	Aug 2022	Lead defence readiness	2 years
ICT18	Aug 2022	Sr cybersecurity consultant	6 years
ICT19	Aug 2022	Cloud solution architect	1 year
P20	Aug 2022	Platform engineering manager	16 years
ICT21	Aug 2022	Senior customer engineer	3.5 years
ICT22	Aug 2022	Principal data and applied scientist	4.5 years
ICT23	Aug 2022	Solutions specialist	4 years
ICB24	Aug 2022	Change manager	4 years
P25	Aug 2022	Business group leader	9 years
ICT26	Sept 2022	Cloud solution architect	9 months
P27	Oct 2022	Education director	5.5 years
ICB28	April 2023	Future skills lead	2.5 years
ICB29	May 2023	Future skills specialist	14 months
P30	July 2023	Lead of sales	6.9 years

For reporting purposes, a reference code has been assigned to each participant based on whether the participant is in a business team (ICB), in an IT team (ICT) or a people leader (P) role. In addition to role and gender differences, study participants belonged to different departments and teams in the organisation which was essential for getting various perspectives. Participants also varied in how long they had been with Alfa at the time of their interview, ranging from as little as one month for newly onboarded employees to other participants who have been with the organisation for almost 28 years. Each participant was interviewed once

and were asked about their work arrangements before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (where relevant).

At the time of their interview, 13 participants had been with Alfa long enough to provide commentary on their work experience at Alfa during the three phases of in-person work, fully remote work, and hybrid work, while others were able to comment on their experience during the in-person and fully remote phases of work only (7 participants), or fully remote work phase only (4 participants), or the fully remote and hybrid phases only (5 participants) or only hybrid phase (1 participant). Collectively, the participants' narratives across these three phases provided us with insights into the shifts in work practise over time, enabling an evolutionary perspective of how the nature of work changed over time, the challenges brought about by these changes relating to employee experience, and emerging practices adapting to shifts in work models.

Interviews averaged an hour in duration and the questions were designed to elicit a response about all three phases and models of work at Alfa. However, as all interviews commenced with asking participants about how long they have been with Alfa, adjustments were made to exclude questions that were not applicable to the participant. For example, if a participant had joined Alfa during the fully remote phase, then questions about work arrangements at Alfa pre-pandemic were skipped. In addition to questions relating to the participants' work patterns and associated challenges, participants were also asked about the technologies that supported their work, particularly during the remote and hybrid phases. It was at this point and early in the data collection period that we became aware of the introduction of Microsoft Viva EXM platform.

With interest in the role of this platform in managing the employee experience, interviews were also focused on understanding the use of the platform. Participants were asked specific questions about Viva including their degree of awareness, usage and type of features

used and reasons behind this. For those participants who reported using Viva, further questions aimed to elicit an understanding of the relationship between the human and technology in shaping their work experience including their use patterns, frequency of use, commonly utilised features, and any changes to their work patterns as a result of prompts and nudges facilitated by the tool.

Each interview was transcribed and imported into the NVivo qualitative data analysis software for the coding process. In addition to the primary dataset generated from the interviews, the study also used secondary data sources published by the organisation on remote and hybrid work models, reports on work analytics and insights and promotional material of the adopted EXM, Viva. Data analysis was inductive, focusing on identifying shifts in work patterns and challenges experienced by managers and employees, primarily during the fully remote work and emerging challenges as the organisation transitioned into hybrid work. At the time of the study which commenced in December 2021, the standard practice for employees at Alfa was flexibility in working from home 50 per cent of the time. The analysis also aimed to identify how challenges experienced by employees were addressed by the data insights provided by the EXM platform and how new work practices evolved as the employees used EXM platforms in their hybrid work.

The study adopted a thematic analysis approach, which is widely adopted in qualitative studies (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017) and followed the work of Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013) in the visual development of the data structure. First, raw data from our interviews was coded in NVivo by applying researchers' selected codes to the sentence and paragraph level where appropriate, resulting in over 110 initial codes. Following a clean-up process, codes were further regrouped and classified by a common feature, such as data relating to specific periods (before, during and after the pandemic), data relating to Viva, data relating to practices demonstrated by managers and the leadership community and so forth. The

outcome of this first phase led to the generation of first-order concepts. Next, we analysed the first-order concepts to identify the second-order themes. While being profoundly informed by the data, identifying the second-order themes was guided by concepts from our literature review related to employee experience and hybrid work, such as digital wellbeing, engagement, trust and relationship building, work–life balance and productivity (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). Finally, aggregate dimensions were derived to enable a theoretical conceptualisation of the digital embeddedness of an EXM platform in hybrid work. Two data structures emerged out of this thematic analysis process. The first data structure captures data about employee experience challenges in remote and hybrid work, as seen in Figure 2 and Appendix A.

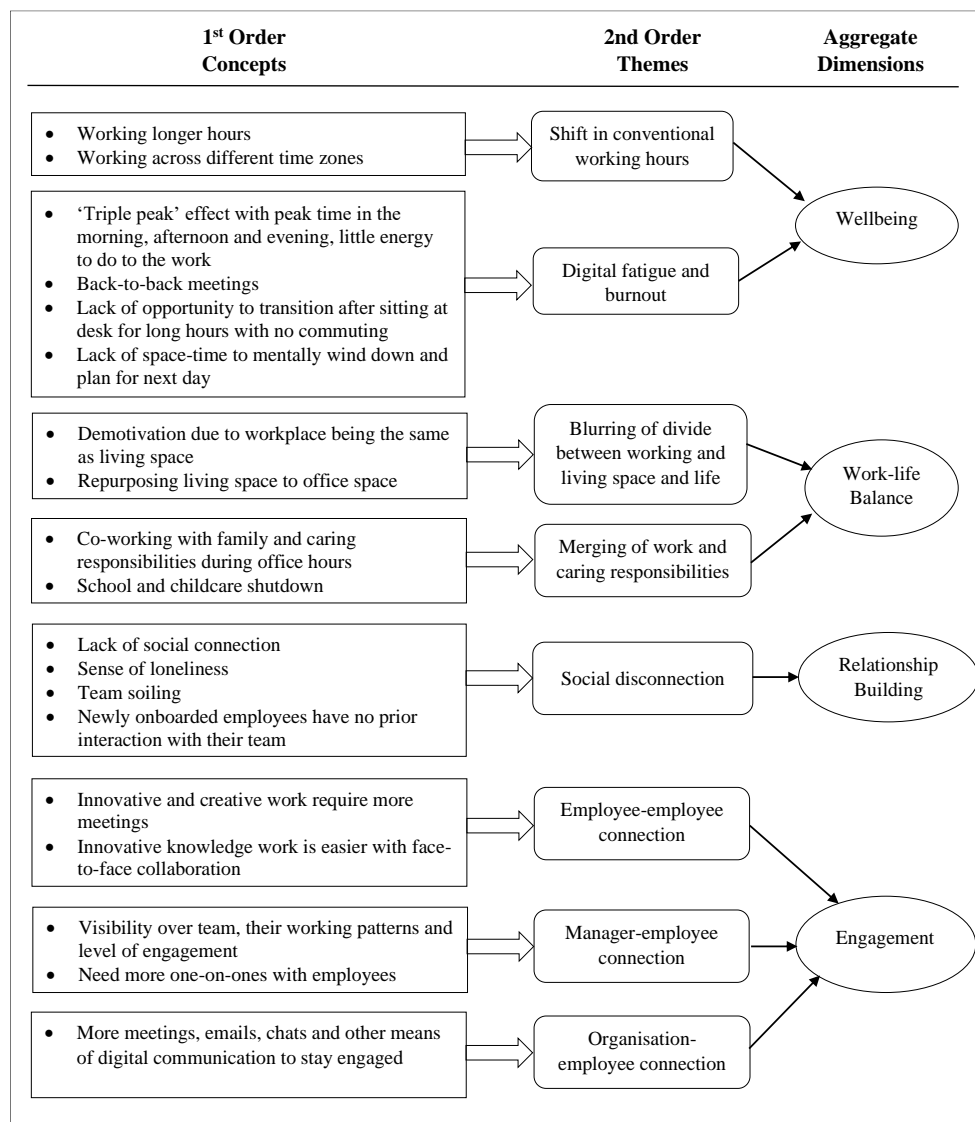


Figure 2. Challenges in remote and hybrid work data structure.

Capturing the challenges experienced by the employees is important to understand the role played by EXM platforms to overcome these challenges and how digital embeddedness reconfigured the hybrid work. The second data structure captures the data about the EXM platform configuration and reconfiguration of employee experience observed in hybrid work, as seen in Figure 3 and Appendix C.

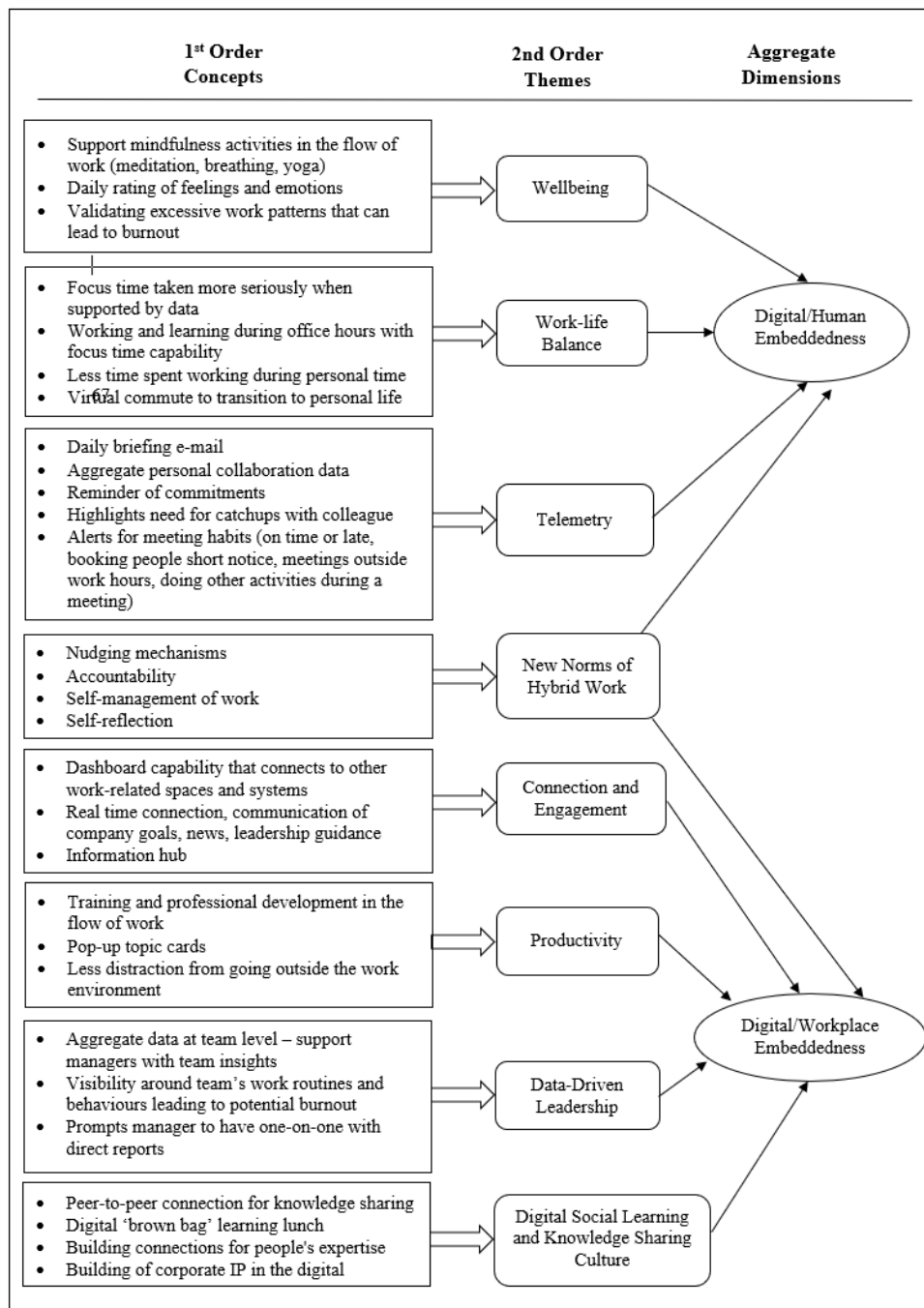


Figure 3. EXM platform configuration in hybrid work data structure.

Findings

Understanding how an EXM platform is configured and reconfigured over time has been central to our data analysis. Using an evolutionary perspective, we present how challenges experienced by employees in remote and hybrid work have influenced the use and perspectives they developed – at the time of the study – towards Viva. It is the aggregation of these challenges and their impact on the quality of the work and personal lives of the employees is what entails the employee experience dimension. Our findings section is structured around two parts. The first part captures the evolutionary perspective and reports on how the workplace at Alfa has been configured, leading to the popularity of hybrid work. In the second part, we report on the findings relating to the digital embeddedness of the Viva platform and the role it has played in shaping the modern employee experience at Alfa in hybrid work. A summary of this evolutionary perspective is demonstrated in Figure 4.

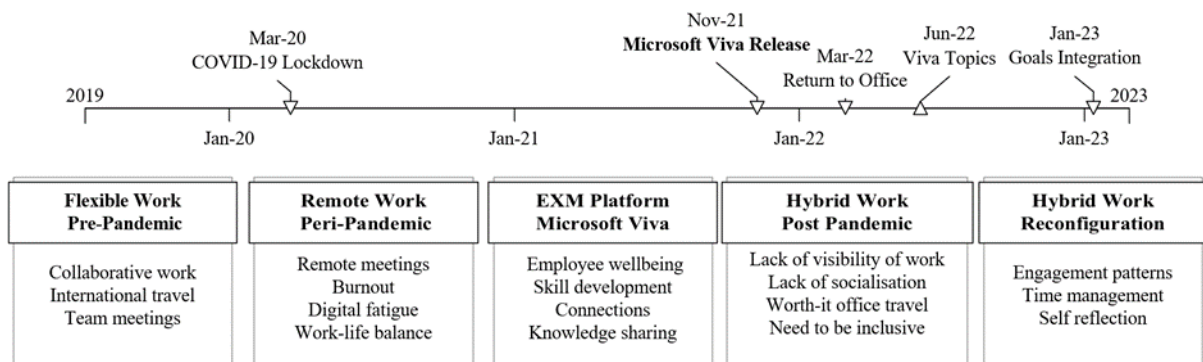


Figure 4. Evolution of Hybrid Work

Alfa's workplace configuration pre-, during and post-pandemic

In this section, we present the collation of challenges experienced by employees and managers before, during and after the pandemic and the ways in which employees and managers adapted to the changing work models.

At Alfa, the work model before the pandemic was mostly based on the conventional physical office work which we refer to as in-person. However, only a few participants reported their work arrangement pre-pandemic as including an element of remote work, sometimes

described as '*working from home*' or '*flexible*' work. Typically, this would be due to the flexibility that the role requires, such as having to travel, supporting clients and working with team members across different time zones and would involve working an agreed upon days from home and others in person. However, this hybrid arrangement was reported on a small scale and case-by-case basis. Only one participant reported being able to work fully remotely due to personal circumstances but with full support from their manager. In this case, participants also mentioned that they were expected to make the remote arrangement work, given that Alfa did not have any formal work policies on remote work. The hybrid work practices observed at Alfa pre-pandemic indicate that there was an organisational and cultural readiness to support hybrid work arrangements but was adopted at a smaller scale.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and as employees around the world went into enforced remote work, our study participants reported this period as being very challenging, which impacted their ability to manage their work and continue to be engaged with their team, managers, clients and the organisation. Apart from the difficulty of the sudden and unprecedented change that took place and the need to quickly adapt and recreate a working space at home, several challenges emerged as illustrated in the data structure in Figure 2 and detailed in Appendix A. The first of these challenges relates to wellbeing, where participants reported shifts in their conventional working hours, and three peaks in the workday. Participants also reported experiencing digital fatigue and burnout from the prolonged use of technological tools, increased number of meetings, longer working hours, working across different time zones and lack of space to mentally wind down after the working day.

A second challenge was the blurring of the divide between work and personal life, resulting in a shift in the work–life balance for most employees. With the enforced lockdown, employees had to juggle work with caring responsibilities due to school and childcare closure. This impacted the employees' motivation, morale and ability to finish their work within the

typical working hours, leading to longer working days. Other challenges relate to the lack of incidental connections in the workplace, such as water cooler conversations, attending corporate events and other opportunities for socialisation. The lack of socialisation caused by lack of face-to-face connection, siloed teams and lack of team and organisational engagement events impacted employees' relationship building and morale. A final set of challenges were reported in relation to employee engagement. Participants reported finding it difficult to perform innovative knowledge work with their colleagues without face-to-face contact and working as a team in a physical space. For managers, the challenge has been in relation to visibility over their teams' working patterns and engagement behaviours and finding new ways to check in with their employees regularly. These challenges have been experienced by employees and managers alike to varying degrees.

In 2022, Alfa implemented a staged return to the office and in-person work. Employees first returned to the office officially in March 2022 while also maintaining some remote work arrangements, resulting in the post-pandemic hybrid work model. At the time of our study, though some employees returned to the office and majority continued to work from home for up to 50% of their time. Employees who wanted to work remotely for more than 50 per cent of the time needed their manager's approval. At this stage, Alfa witnessed another shift as the organisation needed to manage employees who continued to work from home and those who worked in person, ensuring no one was disadvantaged or excluded by their work preference. Participants reported that they continued to experience, to some degree, challenges related to their wellbeing, management of self and work-life balance, socialisation and engagement. Additional challenges were identified that are unique to the new hybrid work arrangement, as majority of the workforce continued to work remotely while others chose to work from the office. These included concerns over the lack of visibility of the work if they chose to continue

to work from home, feeling that they needed to be in the office but being less productive when they were and concerns over being excluded due to their choice of work location.

“To accommodate a workforce that is hybrid so that no one is disadvantaged by choosing to be working remote from home, and so I’m choosing to be in the office and you know we refer to being sort of inclusive so you don’t accidentally exclude anyone.”

(P25)

The three phases of the pandemic, the challenges faced by the employees and managers as illustrated in Figure 2, and the respondents’ commentary in relation to these challenges is provided in Appendix A. As they navigated through these challenges, managers ensured that their teams remained engaged and supported. In managing employees’ physical and mental wellbeing, several new strategies were reported, including defaulting meetings to a shorter duration to allow employees time between back-to-back meetings, peer support groups and shifting the organisation’s culture towards focusing on wellbeing, engagement and care. Alfa used this opportunity to reflect on the employee experience and configure how it could support its employees to remain engaged in the new work model. The next part of the findings reports the reconfiguration of digital embeddedness in hybrid work and the role played by level of embeddedness of the EXM platform in the hybrid work and how it shaped the modern employee experience at Alfa.

Reconfiguring digital embeddedness in hybrid work

Digital embeddedness begins when workplace technology is ingrained into the ecosystem of work technologies used in an organisation. This is where organisations integrate the technology into their operational IT environment and workflow. Initially, in the case of EXM platforms, these platforms can act as provisioning systems that bring together many siloed applications and systems into a single platform. However, over time, the platform reconfigured with additional capabilities enabling new workplace practices suitable for the

nature of the work. For our case study and in response to the two major shifts in work and associated challenges related to employees' experience, Alfa introduced and integrated the Viva platform to enhance the employee experience in the newly emerging hybrid work arrangement.

As an AI-enabled EXM platform, Viva integrates analytics systems and office applications into a single platform with added functionalities. The timing of the Viva launch was not coincidental. Satya Nadella, chief executive officer at Microsoft, announced the development of an EXM platform in February 2021:

“We have participated in the largest at-scale remote work experiment the world has seen, and it has had a dramatic impact on the employee experience. Every organisation will require a unified employee experience, from onboarding and collaboration to continuous learning and growth. Viva brings together everything an employee needs to be successful, from day one, in a single, integrated experience directly in Teams.”
(Satya Nadella, CEO, Microsoft, as quoted in Microsoft News Center, Feb 2021).

The platform was launched with four key modules: 1) Viva Learning, 2) Viva Topics, 3) Viva Connections and 4) Viva Insights. Each of these modules supports several capabilities, as summarised in Appendix B. The AI-embedded EXM platform supports the employee experience in multiple ways. With its core modules, the platform enables training, growth and building a culture of learning across the organisation (Viva Learning), connects relevant content and enables harnessing of knowledge and expertise (Viva Topics), facilitates internal communication and access to corporate intranet and resources (Viva Connections) and reveals individualised and aggregated team insights into work patterns and routines that could potentially lead to burnout (Viva Insights) (John et al., 2022).

Using aggregation and de-identification mechanisms, data privacy and security are ensured. Viva captured the work patterns employees engaged in, their digital work and whether

they worked from home or the office, as long as their work was completed using digital means. This AI capability enabled the datafication of work patterns in hybrid work and the core components were clearly configured to overcome the employee experience challenges identified in remote and hybrid work environment. Viva was released to public availability in November 2021. At this time, Viva was introduced and embedded in Alfa's hybrid work setting when the employees were slowly returning to the office. Viva became an integral part of Alfa's hybrid work model and contributed to the emergence of the two dimensions of digital embeddedness. Examples of case-specific references to the use of Viva in our study are summarised in Appendix C.

Next, we present the emergence of the two dimensions of digital embeddedness: digital/workplace embeddedness and digital/human embeddedness as illustrated in Figure 3, allowing us to unpack how the EXM is configured by the nature of work and how it enables the reconfiguration of new work practices in hybrid work. Our study findings indicate that Viva enabled the configuration of new hybrid workplace practices at Alfa, both at the employee and organisational levels. At the employee level, Viva enables the configuration of hybrid workplace practices in the following areas: wellbeing, work–life balance and telemetric assistance. These illustrate the digital/human embeddedness of the EXM platform. Similarly, the findings indicate that Viva enables the configuration of new hybrid workplace practices at a broader organisational or workplace level, including connection and engagement, productivity, data-driven leadership, digital and social learning and knowledge-sharing culture. These illustrate the digital/workplace embeddedness of the platform. We further identify that the digital embeddedness in hybrid work occurs in three stages: adaptation, transformation, and reconfiguration:

- **Adaptation:** the adaptation stage of digital embeddedness is defined as any modification to the digital work ecosystem that makes it better fit for improving employee experience.

- Transformation: the transformation stage of digital embeddedness is defined as the radical change in the digital work ecosystem introduced to improve employee.
- Reconfiguration: this is defined as the emergence of new computations in digital work to measure the employee experience at an organisational, team or individual level— resulting in cognitive decision-making by leaders or employees.

In what follows, we explore how these three stages contribute to the reconfiguration of new hybrid work practices along the different dimensions of digital embeddedness.

Theme 1: Digital/human embeddedness: A reconfiguration process

The first dimension of digital embeddedness conceptualises how Viva draws upon data analytics trends and insights to configure desirable practices for individual employees in hybrid work. This is enabled by the AI capabilities of the platform and is implemented through the mechanism of nudging or prompting suitable behaviours and actions. While the platform can nudge users to implement these actions, it lacks enforcement mechanisms. Therefore, employees are free to act upon or ignore these nudges. As noted earlier, our study indicates that Viva enables this signalling mechanism and management of work in three theme areas: wellbeing, work–life balance and telemetry as illustrated in Figure 3 (Appendix C).

In the wellbeing theme, Viva supports mindfulness activities such as breathing and yoga, enables the daily rating of one’s feelings and emotions and highlights excessive work patterns that can lead to burnout: *“Bring in your yoga practices into the [organisation] work environment. Yeah, well, not as much as I would like. I think particularly from the mindfulness and the breathing.” (ICB13)*. To enable better work–life balance, Viva enables the booking of focus time where working and learning can happen during office hours. As for the telemetry capability, the platform supports employees with daily briefings that mine employees’ email and Outlook calendars and aggregate work-related data, including collaborations, commitments, due catchups, and meeting habits—such as on-time meetings, meetings outside

working hours and meetings booked with too short notice. It is evident that Viva is configured based on the challenges faced by employees in their workplace. By embedding Viva in the workplace and by analysing the employees work practices and work culture, Viva nudges employees towards various activities to better manage their wellbeing and work. Thus, digital/human embeddedness contributes to the reconfiguration of new work practices enabling a better employee experience in three stages (Table 2).

Table 2 *Three Stages of Digital Embeddedness*

Digital Embeddedness	Digital/Human Embeddedness	Digital/Workplace Embeddedness
<p>Adaptation: Any modification to the digital work ecosystem that makes it better fit for improving employee experience.</p>	<p><i>“An email in my inbox every single day saying that ‘this is what you have on today’, right. ‘Here are some documents from your last week or two weeks’ worth of work that could be relevant to the meetings that you got coming up and these are the people you spoke to. And these were the outcomes from those last meetings’. It turns up in my inbox.” (P12)</i></p>	<p><i>“The manager insights are very powerful. It’s not personal but you know there are ways we can see the trends. If people are disengaging, not individual, but teams, it’ll say to me you if I hadn’t, like, you haven’t had a one-on-one with this direct report for two weeks.” (P15)</i></p>
<p>Transformation: The radical change in the digital work ecosystem introduced to improve employee experience.</p>	<p><i>“Let’s put in focus time into your calendar and really block some time out. a way to block some time out around all those other meetings that are a little bit more distracting.” (P14).</i></p>	<p><i>“You can add yourself as a topic expert to be contacted...so it’s building connections for people’s expertise and that’s very important for the technical teams, like who’s the subject matter expert? We have that corporate IP that’s building constantly through the Viva topics...it’s creating a digitised way of sharing your subject matter expertise.” (P15)</i></p>
<p>Reconfiguration: The emergence of new computations in digital work to measure the employee experience at an organisational, team or individual</p>	<p><i>“I do see my own insights and analysis, and so I do get a report regularly around how much time am I spending outside working hours online. And I do actually find that interesting and impactful. It’s not something</i></p>	<p><i>“We use our technology and the listening systems in place to be able to look at some of the signals, which we were then able to then use to then ensure that we had the policies that benefits the education for our people</i></p>

level— resulting in cognitive decision-making by leaders or employees.	<i>that I had paid attention to before, but now I do.” (P12)</i>	<i>leaders that we’re addressing, the things that we could see was so important for our business.” (P24).</i>
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Adaptation stage in digital/human embeddedness

We grouped any computation of digital work specific to employees provided by Viva based on challenges identified in remote and hybrid work under the theme of adaptation. Hence, we identified algorithmic recommendations provided by Viva to improve employees’ self-management of their work and to help employees efficiently manage resources, connections, time and work in a hybrid work environment as adaptation stage of digital/human embeddedness. The work-related recommendations provided by EXM platforms were adapted by employees in their digital work ecosystem to enhance their work experience in hybrid work and is an example of the adaptation stage in digital/human embeddedness.

Transformation stage in digital/human embeddedness

We identified new ways of digital work in which employees specifically transform their work patterns, as Viva is embedded in their workflow under the transformation stage. New initiatives related to wellbeing and initiatives to reduce digital burnout by managing the time better and new ways of keeping employees’ social connections high is categorised as the transformation of human/digital embeddedness. Employees using focus time based on the algorithmic recommendations provided by the EXM platforms is a radical change witnessed in the digital work ecosystem and such practices transforms that way employees plan their hybrid work.

Reconfiguration stage in digital/human embeddedness

We captured new computations in digital work that highlighted employee wellbeing and work-related insights. We grouped any algorithmic insights that resulted in employees being adaptive and agile in improving their hybrid work experience under the reconfiguration

category of digital/human embeddedness. The individual work insights provided by the EXM platforms enabled the employees to realise their own work patterns and to reconfigure their own work culture resulting in better employee experience.

Thus, digital/human embeddedness of EXM platforms in the digital work ecosystem, resulted in the configuration of new hybrid workplace practices as employees adapted, transformed, and reconfigured their individual work practices based on their individual needs.

Theme 2: Digital/workplace embeddedness: A reconfiguration process

The second dimension of digital embeddedness conceptualises how the functionalities of Viva reconfigure workplace practices at the organisational level in a hybrid work. This is achieved through the Viva built-in modules that enable workplace practices in four key theme areas: connection and engagement, productivity, data-driven leadership and digital social learning and knowledge-sharing culture as illustrated in Figure 3 and detailed with examples in Appendix C. Viva integrates many work-related systems into one place through its platformisation module ‘connections’. For example, Viva integrates Sharepoint and Teams to bring workgroup or socialising teams together, enabling multiple team connections and collaborations. The platform has also been configured as a real-time point of connection for employees in the organisation. It allows the organisation can make company announcements and news and corporate-related information. This capability enables connection and engagement mechanisms for employees to feel a part of the organisation regardless of their work location:

“I think the whole platform gives us the ability to still stay better connected because I think of some of those habits we developed...so things like we put in and this is a favour but just into teams we put like we call it the water cooler, the education water cooler so that the everyone talks about those conversations and that’s really anybody whatever you’re thinking go and put it on there and it’s actually quite engaging because actually

you hearing from everybody around the country, whereas beforehand, I'm probably only be hearing people who you know, are close to me.” (P27)

Productivity is another theme where reconfiguration of the employee experience is observed. Our study findings show that the platform supports learning, training and professional development and career planning in the workflow. This is where employees no longer need to leave the corporate intranet to external sites, such as LinkedIn Learning, Coursera, edX or others. Instead, the platform integrates these capabilities into the workflow and the Teams environment, configuring how learning can happen without distraction. This has been a particularly supportive capability for newly onboarded employees, who can find all their onboarding and training requirements in the platform.

As a third theme, digital/workplace embeddedness enables data-driven leadership practices where managers have visibility of their team's working habits and routines through aggregate team data (insights), highlighting potential burnout and where one-on-one connections are required. These insights enable managers to support their employees regardless of where they work. *“It's also about helping management understand what exactly do people do, and you know what's being done without, uh, tracking, right? So it's being done in a nice way, not a bad way.” (P12)*. Finally, digital social learning and knowledge-sharing culture constitute another theme where digital/workplace embeddedness has enabled new workplace practices in hybrid work that enhance the employee experience. For example, our data shows that digital social learning and knowledge sharing can be achieved as the platform enables peer-to-peer connections for knowledge sharing through what used to be 'brown bag' learning lunch capabilities. It also builds connections to subject matter experts, using AI technology to mine Microsoft 365 and other work environments, and highlights topics and related subject matter experts, as employees use Office 365 applications like SharePoint or search in Word, PowerPoint, Outlook and Excel.

Digital/workplace embeddedness resulted in understanding employees needs based on the datafied digital work environment and to support and empower employees to be more engaged and productive while also ensuring their well-being. Digital/workplace embeddedness ultimately resulted in adapting, transforming and reconfiguring organisational strategies, work agreements and leadership initiatives based on the dynamic feedback obtained from the EXM platforms (Table 2) as detailed below.

Adaptation stage in digital/workplace embeddedness

We grouped any computation of digital work that uses Viva embedded in the organisation based on the challenges identified in remote and hybrid work under the theme of adaptation. Hence, we identified initiatives to integrate various work technologies to help employees efficiently manage resources, connections, time and work in a hybrid work environment. This is grouped as adaptation stage in digital/workplace embeddedness. Digital listening and reflecting on employee feedback was adapted to the EXM platforms for not only monitoring staff performance but also to gain insights about the sentiments of work culture. The insights gained were used to improve organisation's meeting culture.

Transformation stage in digital/workplace embeddedness

We identified new ways of digital work—resulting from Viva being embedded in the organisation—to overcome the challenges in remote and hybrid work. This is grouped under the transformation stage of digital/workplace embeddedness. We grouped new ways of social learning, knowledge sharing, and engagement carried out at a broader organisational level as transformation in organisation/digital embeddedness. The feature of tagging topics as well as tagging connections implemented in Viva EXM Platforms is a new form of knowledge management and social networking that caters towards employee's skill development and their contacts in the new forms of hybrid work.

Reconfiguration stage in digital/workplace embeddedness

We captured new computations in digital work that highlighted team wellbeing and engagement. This resulted in the implementation of changes in work culture and enabled leaders to manage hybrid teams effectively. This is classified as the reconfiguration stage in digital/workplace embeddedness. We grouped any algorithmic insights focusing on the engagement and wellbeing of a team and their digital work experience, which resulted in leaders being adaptive and agile in improving the hybrid work experience under the reconfiguration stage. Reconfiguration stage in digital/workplace embeddedness is thus evidenced as the emergence of new computations of the employees' digital work to measure their team experience leading towards some reconfiguration of the work patterns by leaders and employees.

Figure 5 captures this reconfiguring process portraying the dynamic nature of digital embeddedness in hybrid work. Linking back to Figure 4, Figure 5 illustrates the flow of digital embeddedness as EXM platforms were configured to address employees' challenges based on a digital listening process during and after the remote work. As EXM platforms were integrated into the flow of work, datafication of digital work resulted in nudging mechanisms to improve employee experience in hybrid work. This flow of digital embeddedness in hybrid work resulted in reconfiguring employees work patterns and workplace culture.

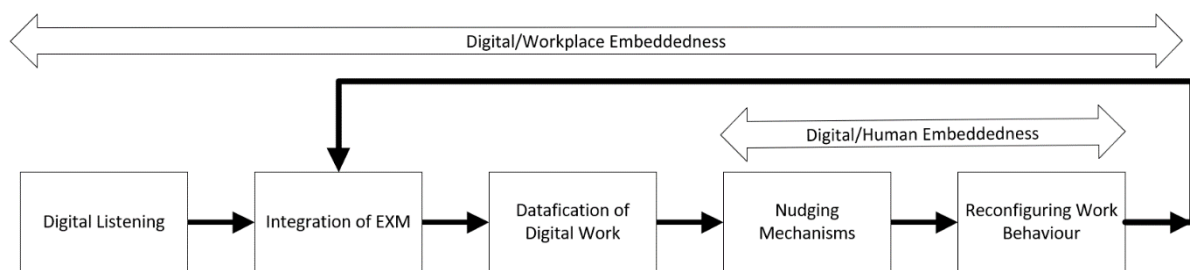


Figure 5. The Flow of Digital Embeddedness in Hybrid Work.

Discussion

The study was driven by an interest in understanding the role of EXM platforms in the increasingly popular hybrid work. Despite being digitally dependent, hybrid workplaces are not just a technological phenomenon; they embody a complex multidimensional relationship that entangles employees' roles, leaders' decisions and their organisation's strategies. As digital workplace technologies, like EXM platforms and other AI-augmented systems, are embedded in work, digital/human configurations become more complex.

Using the case of a multinational high-tech organisation, we studied the evolutionary nature of digital workplace transformation, prompted by the enforced remote work during the pandemic, to the preferred hybrid work post-pandemic. The introduction of EXM platforms has contributed to fostering improved employee experience. It has led to the further configuration of hybrid work regarding the digital embeddedness of AI-driven technologies. Technologies like EXM platforms are embedded in hybrid work, contributing to two variations of digital embeddedness: digital/human embeddedness and digital/workplace embeddedness. Each of these is configured and helps to reconfigure each other. Subsequently, they contribute to structuring and restructuring hybrid work and employee experiences. It presents the theoretical model derived from the study and depicts the multiple configurations resulting from digital embeddedness in the hybrid work context.

The study makes the following theoretical contributions: First, our study extends our understanding of digital embeddedness in the workplace, particularly digital/human configuration (Baptista et al., 2020). It shows that there are different types of digital embeddedness: digital/workplace embeddedness and digital/human embeddedness. Digital embeddedness further involves a reconfiguration process that undergoes in three stages: adaptation, transformation and reconfiguration. These three stages identified are based on the

degree to which digital embeddedness configures and reconfigures EXM platforms and work patterns in hybrid work.

The adaptation stage of digital embeddedness is different from convergent change, in which the technology is used to enhance the effectiveness of an established aspect of the job (Klein & Watson-Manheim, 2021). The adaptation stage is a means of digital embeddedness by which the integration or datafication of previously existing activities helps improve employees' experiences rather than creating a space of change in the job. This stage of digital embeddedness allow recreation of "human wholistic thinking" as highlighted by Fischer & Baskerville (2022).

The transformation stage of digital embeddedness creates radical change or new forms of digital work that improve the employee experience. Embedding mindfulness activities like meditation, breathing exercises or yoga in the workflow or having pop-up cards to reduce the search time are examples of how digital embeddedness transforms the employee experience in hybrid work (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). This stage of digital embeddedness provides a sense of fulfillment and purpose, which will be experienced as well-being in hybrid work (Fischer et al., 2023) and results in meaningful work providing a sense of fulfilment.

The final stage of digital embeddedness is the reconfiguration of hybrid work and employee experience and relates to any computations in digital work that result in cognitive decision-making by leaders and employees. This stage is like the third-order effect of altered institutional framing (Baptista et al., 2020; Klein & Watson-Manheim, 2021), as it reveals '*the deep structural changes related to the identities of actors and their institutions*'. The reconfiguration stage identifies new norms of hybrid work and digital work culture as employees, leaders and organisations use their individual digital work and reflect on how to improve their work and work experience.

Thus, as EXM platforms are embedded in work life, the wholeness of algorithmic management and analytics depends on the range of accessible data to be integrated and learnt from. The recommendation and nudging provided by the algorithmic learning might raise unexpected activities or initiatives, increasing ambidexterity in decision-making. The need to experience a meaningful work life in hybrid work makes it important to understand the concept of care, empathy and wellbeing, as employees can experience isolation and invisibility when organisations focus on productivity. As stated by Malik et al. (2022), employees and leaders receive various stimuli from EXM platforms based on the digital work environment they are embedded in. Leaders selecting strategies to better engage with their team members, and employees choosing strategies to maintain their work–life balance are identified as the reconfiguration of hybrid work (Wunderlich & Fischer, 2022). Finding a balance between the indistinguishable boundaries between the employees’ well-being and their digital work is important. Thus, the reconfiguration process of employee experience and hybrid work is inter-related to digital/human embeddedness and digital/workplace embeddedness. This coevolution of EXM platforms and hybrid work requires more in-depth study, as we are yet to understand how EXM platforms learn along with employees and organisations to reconfigure the future of work.

Second, our study adds to the current literature on socio-technical reversal (Fischer & Baskerville, 2022; Fischer et al., 2023). Employee experiences in a hybrid work environment embedded with AI-enabled EXM platforms are shaping and are shaped by physical and digital realities as we extend on Figure 1. Informed by the perspective of socio-technical reversal, we argue that since an EXM platform is a new-generation workplace technology, it can dynamically anticipate and respond to the needs and intentions of employees (Lyytinen et al., 2021; Schuetz & Venkatesh, 2020). Employee experience in terms of engagement and communication have dual realities, where a digital reality is constructed first, and the living

reality is created as a reflection of the digital (Baskerville et al., 2020), resulting in the human experience being shaped by the intertwined duality of both realities. Initially, the reality of digital work represented and reflected on the physical world. However, our study shows that the relationship between these realities is changing. For example, to illustrate how the process of reconfiguration of hybrid work happens, the digital reality of a hybrid meeting is created as the principal aspect. Hybrid meeting is configured, providing a choice to attendees to join the meeting in digital or physical reality. If an employee chooses to not attend the meeting at the allocated time, they still have access to the meeting materials —such as meeting recordings, linked documents and collected survey feedback. These digital realities of hybrid work empower employees giving them flexibility to catch up with meetings at their own place and time. This freedom to choose a preferred mode of meeting is the phenomenon of reconfiguration of hybrid work resulting in socio-technical reversal (Fischer et al., 2023).

This changing relationship between digital and physical realities surrounding and shaping employee experience involves the integrated digital work ecosystem embedded with AI-enabled EXM platforms. In our study, we have seen how AI-enabled EXM platforms and employees as humans co-evolve at the workplace. As quoted by Baskerville et al. (2020, p 517), *‘with the ontological reversal in our digital world, the focus shifts from users who consume information to the co-creation of computed human experiences. People are now active creators of digital content, digital conversations, and digital objects.’* This is realistic in the context of AI-enabled EXM platforms as it transforms from a platform that helps employees consume information to the co-creation of employee experiences in the organisation. Every employee who uses technologies in hybrid work can become an active creator of digital content, digital conversations, and digital objects—which enables them to be visible in the hybrid work and reconfigure their work to make it more meaningful. Our study extends the socio-technical reversal perspective within the context of EXM platforms. We present the

integration of AI-enabled EXM platforms in hybrid work through the lens of five sociotechnical principles theorized by Fischer et al. (2023) in table 3 below.

<i>Five T-S Principles (Fischer et al., 2023)</i>	<i>Reconfiguring Digital Embeddedness in Hybrid Work with EXM platforms</i>
<p><i>1. Joint optimization:</i> refers to the principle that an individual should be viewed as complementary to the machine rather than as an extension of it.</p>	<p>This study demonstrates how the configuration of the AI-enabled EXM platform, Microsoft Viva, prioritizes both economic and humanistic objectives, particularly in response to the recent global pandemic and the evolution of hybrid work. Different levels of Digital/Workplace Embeddedness and Digital/Human Embeddedness clearly evidence how employees and leaders are empowered to reconfigure their hybrid work. As we increasingly integrate AI into our digital workflows, especially with the advent of Generative AI, it is crucial to ensure joint optimization in the workplace. (Fischer & Baskerville, 2023; Sarker et al., 2019).</p>
<p><i>2. Continuous learning:</i> Human learning and experience are foundational to the continued development of the ability to respond pertinently on the individual-human- and the organizational-social level.</p>	<p>As employees adopt AI-enabled EXM platforms in their digital work, it is important to prioritize their re-skilling and upskilling. For instance, Viva Learning empowers employees to engage in mandatory or optional learning as part of their professional development and work life. Digital social learning and a culture of knowledge sharing exemplify the importance of continuous learning. Each employee's individual experience, along with the collective experience recorded by EXM platforms, enables holistic reflection on how to better design workflows to ensure wellbeing and productivity (Fischer et al., 2023).</p>
<p><i>3. Sufficient variety:</i> Finding a fitting balance between variety to grow competencies and skills, and the straining cognitive consequences of handling work that are not automated.</p>	<p>This study finds that AI-enabled EXM platforms like Microsoft Viva increase the datafication of digital work, with a focus on nudging, recommendations, and curation for human decision-making rather than full automation of tasks. However, with the recent advancements in Generative AI embedded in our digital work, it is essential to find a balance between our competencies and our work experiences.</p>
<p><i>4. Holistic workflows:</i> A broad and unified access to oceans of data can allow developments of machinery supplementation and recreation of human wholistic thinking.</p>	<p>Insights and recommendations from AI-enabled EXM platforms empower employees to gain a holistic view of workflows. EXM platforms promote the reconfiguration of human-designed workflows based on three stages of embeddedness: adaptation, transformation, and reconfiguration. As EXM platforms become integral to our workflows, it is essential to ensure that employees do not lose their sense of command over the entire workflow.</p>

<p>5. Meaningful work: Work in the digital first reality, must continuously be perceived as meaningful. It must provide a sense of fulfillment and purpose, which will be experienced as well-being.</p>	<p>In the modern hybrid work, the importance of experiencing a meaningful work life for every employee is paramount. With the integration of AI-enabled technologies like EXM platforms into hybrid work environments, individuals transition into active digital content creators, thereby enhancing the visibility of their digital work. Employees need to ensure that as they reconfigure their hybrid work based on the insights from EXM platforms they have a sense of fulfillment and purpose (Fischer et al., 2024).</p>
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As organisations move towards AI-augmented hybrid work, there is a need to work out and plan towards how to reconfigure their digital embeddedness and empower their employees in continuous learning, autonomously choosing sufficient variety in handling their own work, in holistic thinking and ultimately engaging in meaningful work (Fischer et al., 2023). Thus, this study is advancing the understanding of hybrid work as a dynamic phenomenon. Hybrid work is being reconfigured and re-imagined by both employees and managers. This has implications for further research, which we explore below.

Research and Practical Implications

This study adopts the lens of digital/human interaction to explore the reciprocal process of how EXM platforms configure and are reconfigured in hybrid work to enable emerging practices for employee engagement. The study contributes to a theoretical understanding of digital embeddedness as a dynamic process and where the reconfiguration of hybrid work practices evidences a joint optimization. Digital/human embeddedness and digital/workplace embeddedness are the two dimensions identified that influence the configuration and reconfiguration of employee experience in hybrid work. Limitations of this study is that it focuses on one organisation and one EXM platform and their employee experience in a three-year time span.

The study opens the agenda for future research in the field of hybrid work embedded with rapidly evolving AI-enabled work analytics to carry out longitudinal and ethnographic

studies on the configurations of employee experience in emerging workspaces. Digital/human embeddedness and digital/workplace embeddedness will play a significant role in reconfiguring the future of work as we embed emerging generative AI technologies like Microsoft 365 Copilot (Abhari & Eisenberg, 2023). In addition, there are opportunities for researchers to investigate on effective leadership behaviour and practices in this emerging workspace. Further research is also needed to examine the new and emerging work culture and the transformation of hybrid work, resulting in change for employees' worth-it work and leaders being data-driven and inclusive (Baptista et al., 2020). Finally, more studies are needed on the use of EXM platforms in hybrid and other workplaces. We readily acknowledge that in our study we did not find any issues with uptake and use of the platform. Our explanation of this is that the data was collected soon after the introduction of Viva in Alfa following a prolonged period of remote work in Australia. This explains in our view the positive response they expressed towards the new platform as they saw this as an opportunity to overcome some of the challenges, they experienced during the enforced remote work period. As EXM platforms are embedded in hybrid work, the wholeness of algorithmic management and analytics depends on the range of accessible data to be integrated and learnt from (Malik et al., 2022). The recommendation and nudging provided by algorithmic learning may raise unexpected activities or initiatives, increasing ambidexterity in decision-making. This is an issue that deserves further investigation. In addition, the need to experience a meaningful work life in hybrid work makes it important to understand the concept of care, empathy and wellbeing as employees may experience isolation and invisibility in the organisation's focus on productivity.

The study also has implications for practitioners. EXM platforms go beyond providing metrics and analytics on employees' work performance. They provide opportunities for adopting a human-centred leadership approach that encompasses attention to learning and

development, wellbeing, and productivity by reconfiguring leadership to overcome various challenges experienced by employees. EXM platforms also provide opportunities for employees to drive significant changes in their work model by using data driven insights to reflect on their own productivity and wellbeing in a hybrid work environment. It is important to recognise that AI-enabled work technologies like EXM platforms continuously reconfigure employee experience and hybrid work based on the level of digital embeddedness. Though configuration and reconfiguration of digital embeddedness provide solutions for overcoming hybrid work challenges, organisational leaders and managers should actively foster employee engagement towards improving employee experience.

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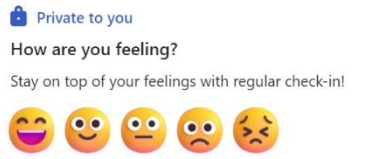
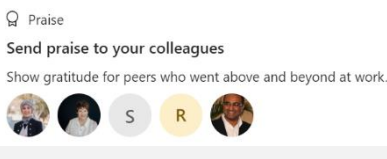

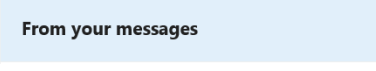
Appendices

Appendix A - Challenges Experienced by Employees in Remote and Hybrid Work Phases

Remote work during the pandemic	
Wellbeing	<p><i>“It’s very easy to be digitally fatigued. We have people pinging us at all hours of the day because we can now work from anywhere in the world, which means we’re working across time zones. So, we have people messaging us on teams we’re doing teams calls at all hours of the day, constant like notifications and also those back-to-back meetings where we’re in back-to-back meetings for three or four hours in a day...we just get so sort of fatigued and burnt out that we don’t have the energy in us to actually deliver the work.” (ICB6)</i></p> <p><i>“you have a peak time in the morning, you have a peak time in the afternoon, and then you have a peak time at night-time.” (P6)</i></p>
Work life balance	<p><i>“When you’re in the same space as you work and your rest it begins actually to impact you over time, you feel a lot more demotivated...I just felt like I was always staring at a screen...I feel a little bit burnt out.” (ICB2)</i></p>
Relationship building	<p><i>“It certainly has been difficult because you don’t have that, informal, just meeting people catching up. It’s all very structured in order for any, otherwise you’re just not goanna be chatting to these people unless it’s something that’s scheduled and organised.” (ICB11)</i></p> <p><i>“You arrange coffee catchup just to kind of, you know, pick their brains about something or whatever it may be...I missed those incidental connections.” (P5)</i></p>
Engagement	<p><i>“that definitely felt, uh yeah, quiet, I guess lonely at times because you are really lacking that kind of human interaction.” (P24)</i></p> <p><i>“I’m doing whiteboarding on my laptop and then my video like I’m kind of looking at the expression because we’re not in person.” (P1)</i></p> <p><i>“on boarding was terrible because ... I’m still learning stuff.” (P7)</i></p>
Post-pandemic hybrid work	

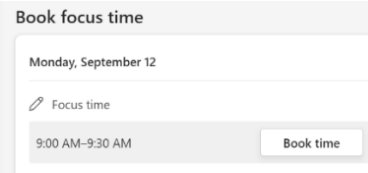
Productivity	<p><i>“I’m just, you know, making a judgement call based on what I think makes sense based on my diary, based on the meetings that I have and whether it makes sense for me to be in the office. You know, how much value is there going to be in me being in the office versus working from home? And sometimes, you know, it depends on, yeah, just depends on what you’ve got on.” (P1)</i></p> <p><i>“When I went back to office, I couldn’t finish any work. I was like two days in the office, and I was like, ‘I’ll just go home and I’ll do my work in the evening’, because social part of it, like, takes over because we are human beings. We are connected to talk to each other. We want to make sure we’re all good and, you know, and especially in open office environment, it’s very hard because you work with people.” (ICT23)</i></p>
Need for inclusive leadership	<p><i>“To accommodate a workforce that is hybrid so that no one is disadvantaged by choosing to be working remote from home, and so I’m choosing to be in the office, and you know we refer to being sort of inclusive so you don’t accidentally exclude anyone.” (P25)</i></p>

Appendix B - Microsoft Viva EXM Platform and its Functions

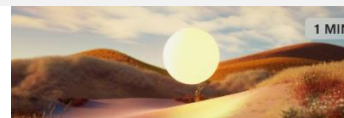
	<p>Viva x</p> <p>Help employees maintain effective collaboration habits, follow through on their commitments and keep track of one’s general wellbeing at work.</p>	
Functions	Description	Example
Sentiment Analysis	Employees can record their daily reflections and analyse a trend of mood swings during work.	
Reward & Recognition	Employees can send praise and greetings to their co-workers or manager, which enables them to enhance their social interaction.	
Task Management	With the power of AI and analytics, Viva Insights can filter questions	
		

asked or commitments made over email and prompt a to-do list on a daily basis.

Time Management Viva Insights provide a feature where employees can reserve time in their own schedule to focus on work without interruptions or take a break or experience virtual commute.



Digital Wellbeing Mindfulness exercises give employees a choice of meditation exercises to take a break from work and come back with more stability and productivity.



Take a breather break
Spend one minute focusing on your breathing to help reduce stress.

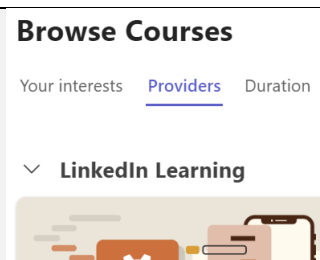
Team Management Manager Insights collects workplace analytics on how the team members are performing.



Viva Learning

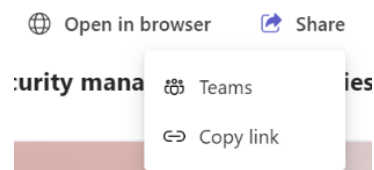
Designed to empower employees to take mandatory or preferential learning as part of their professional development and work life.


Online Training Provides various online training modules and video courses from content providers in a common interface, which is handy for



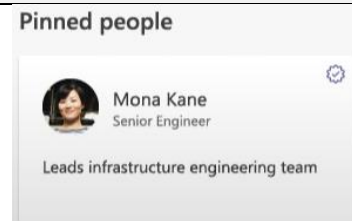
professional development, learning and onboarding.


Social Learning Employees also have options for sharing or recommending courses to co-workers, which supports engagement among team members or managers.



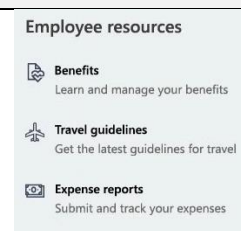
 **Viva Topics**
Targets harnessing knowledge and expertise.

Knowledge Sharing Viva Topics compiles information on topics and creates a dedicated webpage with related information, such as a short description, related people, sites, files and pages.



 **Viva Connections**
Amplify communications in an organisation by facilitating a connections page dedicated to any related information portal.

Engagement & Collaboration Connections can provide a primary information hub inside Teams, which populates the page with related information about the dedicated team.



Appendix C - Case-specific Evidence on Employees Experience with Microsoft Viva

Digital/Human Embeddedness		
Theme	Viva Feature	Case-specific Evidence
Wellbeing	Viva Insights	<p><i>“Viva was good at really calling it out though, particularly at the end of the month where you go, I didn’t even realise that I’d had no days this month where I hadn’t physically logged on and touched something to do with work and you just go well, that’s not right.” (ICT23)</i></p> <p><i>“Bring in your yoga practices into the [organisation] work environment. Yeah, well, not as much as I would like. I think particularly from the mindfulness and the breathing.” (ICB13)</i></p> <p><i>“It does prompt me everyday to say, ‘hey, how are you doing? Do you wanna, you know, rate how are you feeling on a scale of one to five?’ I do take advantage of that, and it’s actually really interesting looking back on the graph and saying, ‘oh, that’s how I felt a week ago. Why was that what was going on there?’” (ICB8)</i></p>
Work-life Balance	Viva Insights	<p><i>“I do get a report regularly around how much time am I spending outside working hours online. What is the percentage of email I do during nine to five versus outside of that window. And I do actually find that interesting and impactful.” (P12)</i></p> <p><i>“I need to take a break or I need to block out time to do some focus...you probably know that you should do those things...when it’s backed with data and it’s showing you, you’ve worked X amount of hours or you’ve multitasked in meetings when you maybe should be focusing.” (ICB16)</i></p> <p><i>“the big thing I really like about it is it’s really pushes me to schedule focus time, which gets me away from the hustle and bustle of meetings and people annoying you and interrupting while you’re in deep work mode. I really like the fact that it prompts me to schedule that and I take advantage of that when</i></p>

		<i>I can.” (ICB11)</i>
Telemetry	Viva Insights	<p><i>“It finds and curates commitments you’ve made, meetings you need to prepare for. It’s been life changing for me because it gives me a daily summary of reminders and what I call nudges ... it helps you be more accountable, the meeting insights...it tells you if you’re on time it tells you if you’ve booked people short notice it and then it starts to kind of build thinking.” (P15)</i></p> <p><i>“Before Viva, you had to maintain a to-do list...whereas now with Viva, it pulls that information out of your chats and emails from your manager and reminds you to do that sort of almost fills in part of that water cooler conversation.” (ICB6)</i></p> <p><i>“It’s [Viva] probably validation of what you know is true that I’m working. You know, I need to take a break, or I need to block out time to do some focus on that’s probably the key thing for me that it’s you probably know that you should do those things, but when it’s, when it’s backed with data and it’s showing you know you’ve worked X amount of hours or you’ve multitasked in meetings when you maybe should be focusing, it’s that sort of thing which just reinforces what you probably should be doing.” (ICB16)</i></p> <p><i>“Viva also recommend as well if I’m emailing someone in the UK or the US. If I put that email address in, it knows they’re working hours and will say, ‘hey, let’s hold this email back and deliver it at a time when they’re back online’. So even though it’s 2:00 pm for me, it will be delivered at the right time for the person who’s receiving it, whatever their time zone maybe.” (ICB6)</i></p>
Digital/Workplace Embeddedness		
Theme	Viva Feature	Case-specific Evidence
Connection and Engagement	Viva Connections	<i>“I think the whole platform gives us the ability to still stay better connected because I think of some of those habits we developed so things like we put in and this is in favour but just into teams we put like we call it</i>

		<p><i>the water cooler, the education water cooler so that the everyone talks about those conversations and that's really anybody whatever you're thinking go and put it on there and it's actually quite engaging because actually you hearing from everybody around the country whereas beforehand I'm probably only be hearing people who, you know, are close to me."</i> (P27)</p> <p><i>"From a Viva connections experience, we're looking at this kind of whole idea of the landing page and creating a springboard to the things that I need to do, whether that be prompting me on some learning that I need to do in Behaviour learning. Maybe it's as, I said, that reading that SharePoint article about, you know, an announcement of a leader and seeing that Viva topic come up in there."</i> (ICB14)</p>
	Viva Insights	<p><i>"There's a daily email for Viva and it is a machine learning and AI-driven like a bot that combines your teams' conversations and emails and...curates commitments you've made...Viva can tell you who you're spending time with. Who are your top collaborators."</i> (P25)</p> <p><i>"There's some interesting insight that it shares with us to say how well we're working with colleagues or with customers or what that connection point is; that sort of telemetry is useful and sort of highlight some gaps that you maybe want to consider changing work habits."</i> (ICB16)</p>
Productivity	Viva Insights	<p><i>"It was amazing, you know, that it was able to support people at that time, So Viva Insights was really the one that's top of mind for me. So personal insights and manager insights as well, so that idea of being able to engage more in your personal productivity and wellbeing through technology right within the flow of work."</i> (P15)</p> <p><i>"it is about bringing these experiences to where you work. So rather than split focus or you know or going off and getting distracted, it is really about trying to bring that experience to you."</i> (P14)</p>

<p>Data-driven Leadership</p>	<p>Viva Insights (Manager Insights)</p>	<p><i>“It’s also about helping management understand what exactly do people do, and you know what’s being done without, uh, tracking, right? So it’s being done in a nice way, not a bad way.” (P12)</i></p> <p><i>“The manager insights is very powerful. It’s not personal but you know there are ways we can see the trends. If people are disengaging, not individual, but teams, it’ll say to me you if I hadn’t, like, you haven’t had a one-on-one with this direct report for two weeks.” (P15)</i></p> <p><i>“Manager Insights can tell early indications that your team might be burning out by working late. So, if people are logging on and sending emails at midnight or sort of outside their typical working hours, that insight would be surfaced to your manager.” (ICB6)</i></p>
<p>Digital Social Learning and Knowledge Sharing Culture</p>	<p>Viva Topics</p>	<p><i>“So Viva Topics is for an engineering team. If there is a topic card and this is a great learning and for new people and for engineering teams. If you hover over, it’s like a little hyperlink and a topic card. Viva topic card comes up, so it’s learning in the flow of work, so you don’t have to go out. I don’t have to go to the intranet.” (P15)</i></p> <p><i>“You can add yourself as a topic expert to be contacted...so it’s building connections for people’s expertise and that’s very important for the technical teams, like who’s the subject matter expert? We have that corporate IP that’s building constantly through the Viva topics...it’s creating a digitised way of sharing your subject matter expertise.” (P15)</i></p>
	<p>Viva Learning</p>	<p><i>“We used to have just a lot of different portals for training and now everything is in Viva, so that’s been good, good to see everything sort of together.” (ICT18)</i></p>