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ABSTRACT

## **Harmony in Hues: Navigating Work-Life Balance for Creative Parents in the UK's Hybrid Landscape**

Abstract

As hybrid work reshapes professional landscapes, creative parents in the UK face unique challenges and opportunities in balancing their artistic and academic careers with family life. This article explores the impact of hybrid work models on work-life integration, examining UK policies and the experiences of academic and artistic professionals. It highlights the fluidity of schedules, the blending of virtual and physical spaces, and the potential for remote collaboration, while also addressing the trade-offs—such as blurred boundaries, time management struggles, and the impact on spontaneous creativity. By analysing policy frameworks and lived experiences, this discussion offers practical insights and strategies for maintaining equilibrium in an evolving work environment, inviting professionals to engage in a broader conversation on sustaining creativity within the hybrid paradigm.

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## **Harmony in Hues: Navigating Work-Life Balance for Creative Parents in the UK's Hybrid Landscape**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the intricate dance of contemporary life, creative parents in the UK are navigating a crossroads as the hybrid work landscape unfolds. The evolving nature of work brings both nuanced challenges and exciting opportunities, particularly for artistic minds striving to balance their professional and family lives. This paper delves into the impact of the hybrid world on work-life balance for these individuals, focusing specifically on the implications of UK policies and the unique experiences of artistic professionals.

This paper explores the interplay between professional endeavours and family life, and it acknowledges the transformative potential of hybrid work models. It highlights the fluid schedules and the integration of virtual and physical spaces that have become hallmarks of the modern workplace, offering unprecedented possibilities for remote collaboration. However, this new flexibility also introduces trade-offs, such as blurred boundaries between work and home and the impact on spontaneity that fuels artistic inspiration.

The University of Derby, situated in the heart of rainy England, serves as the backdrop for this research. As an academic at this institution, I, Alice Marshall, aim to bridge the gap between theoretical exploration and practical application. The insights presented in this paper are not only relevant to current

professionals but also to the students I mentor—our future creative minds—who will inevitably face similar challenges in their careers. This lived experience as a creative parent provides a valuable perspective that enriches the academic discourse and equips aspiring artists with practical knowledge for their professional journeys.

## **The Crossroads of Creative Parenthood**

I am a parent of two young girls. They are aged four and one (so, yes, I am in the ‘trenches’ of parenthood – as they say!) But I am also a full-time Dance Academic. This is a juggle that is hard, a juggle that even my twinkle toes struggle to keep on top of. This balance of work and family life is not specific to my subject area, or even my job, this is a balance that any working parent must deal with, but as a performing artist there are elements of my work that do not fit neatly into nursery and school hours. When I am touring my evenings become my work, when I am presenting at a conference that is over-seas, yet again my evening is my day. This added layer of complexity leaves little room for potential artistic innovation and zaps energy away from the next game of ‘princesses’. But the change the world has seen since the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new dimension to this layered approach to life. Hybrid working has its pros and cons, but personally it has provided me with an extra ‘tool’ in which work, and family life balance allows for my creativity to have time to grow also.

## **The Creative Hybrid Landscape**

Hybrid working in the creative industries is emerging as a significant trend across the world, blurring the lines between traditional employment and self-employment<sup>1</sup>. This hybridisation is particularly evident in cultural and creative sectors, such as design, where workers navigate complex employment relationships<sup>2</sup>. The creative industries have long been associated with flexible work arrangements and self-expressive ideals<sup>3</sup>. However, these hybrid work patterns can reinforce gendered dynamics and traditional notions of work, challenging the progressive narratives often associated with creative labour<sup>4</sup>. Recent case studies suggest that implementing hybrid working models within a clear people strategy can positively impact collaboration, team working, recruitment, retention, and employee engagement<sup>5</sup>. Such approaches may also contribute to leadership development and rebuilding confidence among younger workers affected by COVID-19 lockdowns<sup>6</sup>. As the creative industries, in particular, continue to evolve, hybrid working presents both opportunities and challenges for workers and organisations alike in many countries. This research does highlight the rapid growth in this area across the creative sector and it is evident that the UK is at the forefront of this evolution.

## **The Hybrid Landscape in the UK**

Research on hybrid working in the UK has been extensive, particularly in the wake of the pandemic, which accelerated shifts in work patterns. Before the pandemic, remote and hybrid working were gradually gaining traction. However, the onset of the pandemic marked a significant increase in these practices. At the height of the crisis, nearly half of the workforce in the UK found themselves working from home at some point<sup>7</sup>. Although these numbers have decreased post-pandemic, they remain substantially higher than pre-pandemic levels, indicating a lasting shift towards more flexible work arrangements.

The transition to remote and hybrid working has had impacts on both individuals and organisations. For workers, the ability to balance professional responsibilities with personal life has seen marked

improvement, contributing to enhanced job satisfaction and overall wellbeing. Productivity levels have shown variability, with some employees thriving in a home environment free from office distractions, while others miss the structure and social interaction of traditional workplaces. For organisations, this shift has required a re-evaluation of company culture and operational strategies, with a notable difference observed between sectors. Public sector entities have been more inclined towards adopting flexible working arrangements compared to their private sector counterparts <sup>8</sup>.

A 2023 report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) <sup>9</sup> highlights the growing demand for flexible and hybrid working. Despite many employers embracing these models, there remains a considerable unmet demand among employees. This gap highlights the evolving expectations of the workforce and the need for employers to adapt. The UK Government's proposal to grant employees the right to request flexible working from the first day of employment is poised to further increase these requests, reflecting a shift towards more employee-centric policies.

The future of hybrid working appears robust, with more than 80% of firms having adopted some form of hybrid model, predominantly because of the pandemic <sup>10</sup>. While there is an ongoing push from managers and senior leaders to encourage a return to the workplace, the consensus is that hybrid work should be retained as a best practice. This approach not only caters to employee preferences but also positions organisations as progressive and adaptable in a competitive job market.

Legislation and reforms are pivotal in shaping the implementation of hybrid working. Current UK laws, alongside prospective reforms, aim to enhance flexibility and meet the growing demand from employees. These legal frameworks are designed to improve staff retention and attract new talent, ensuring that the workforce remains dynamic and motivated <sup>11</sup>.

These findings suggest that hybrid working will continue to be a significant aspect of the UK's work landscape. Ongoing research and policy discussions are crucial to optimising hybrid working arrangements for the benefit of both employees and employers. For those interested in more detailed information, reports from the UK Parliament's Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) and CIPD, provide valuable insights into the evolving hybrid work environment.

But where do the creatives fit within this data analysis? And more specifically where do the Creative Parents sit?

## **The Creative Industries Hybrid Landscape in the UK**

Research on the impact of hybrid working in the creative industries has gained significant attention, highlighting the evolving dynamics within this vibrant sector. Creative UK's Annual Report for 2022-23<sup>12</sup> outlines that the UK's Creative Industries have grown faster than the wider economy over the past few years, and there is an argument that this is due to the Hybrid world that we now live in.

The pandemic dealt a significant blow to the creative sector in the UK. Instead of experiencing the predicted growth, the sector's Gross Value Added (GVA) fell by 25% in 2020<sup>13</sup> compared to pre-pandemic levels, a decline twice as severe as that of the overall UK economy. This stark impact shows the vulnerability of the creative industries to global disruptions and the need for resilient and adaptable working models. With the increase we now see in the creative industries economy it is fair to say that Hybrid working has been a blessing in disguise.

Those encounters with other artists to spark innovation are now easier to facilitate. I can now reside in the UK whilst collaborating with fellow colleagues from across the world, we could argue that this is helping all our industries evolve faster. Hybrid working presents both opportunities and challenges for the creative industries, however. It has the potential to enhance creativity, productivity, and wellbeing among professionals, but it also requires ongoing research and adaptation to fully harness its benefits.

But as a creative parent, has hybrid working suddenly made our already un-defined working hours, even more fluid? Yes, I want to engage with a fellow dance artist who resides in New Zealand, but I am up three – nine times a night with a teething one year old. A late-night call will not reflect me at my best.

## **THE CREATIVE PARENT**

As part of my ongoing research, I have created an organisation called The Creative Parent. This is an initiative offering symposiums, support, and research tailored for parents and carers working in the creative industries. It aims to build a community, provide valuable resources, and address the unique challenges faced by creatives juggling professional and caregiving responsibilities. On our Creative Parent socials, we instigated a Padlet collation on the pros and cons of Hybrid working<sup>14</sup>. The following outcomes emerged from this investigation.

### **The Gust of Opening Doors**

#### 1. Fluid Schedules

As creatives we often naturally navigate fluid schedules, where the boundaries between work and personal life can blur. The flexibility of hybrid work models allows us to adapt, but it also demands discipline. A fluid schedule does allow for many to take on more work in and around the hours that parenting demands. The discipline lies with the individual to stop the flow when their wellbeing and family life demands it.

#### 2. Integration of Virtual and Physical Spaces

The virtual canvas merges seamlessly with the physical studio. Creative parents toggle between Zoom meetings and sketchbooks, between spreadsheets and watercolour palettes. This in-person and online interaction means there are times where you can engage with your practice and those in your field, whilst juggling a baby on your knee.

But how can we create a harmonious blend, where the digital and tangible coexist without discord?

#### 3. Remote Collaboration

In the hybrid landscape, collaboration transcends office walls. Creative minds collaborate across time zones, sharing ideas through screens. In my own work I have been fortunate to work with artists that are from across the world, and I have never personally met them. Pre-hybrid working, this notion was there, but not well practised. As I have young children, I am unlikely to jump on a plane to the other side of the world to spark an artistic connection, but I certainly can hop on Zoom as my husband battles with bathtime.

### **The Gentle Closing of Doors**

As doors open to new possibilities, others gently close. As with every new way of working, there are of course negatives that emerge. As creative parents, these negatives often affect not just ourselves, but also our family. As a collective we found the following to be the main cons at present:

#### 1. Time Management

Time management becomes an art form—a delicate brushstroke that allocates minutes to family, hours to creativity, and moments to self-care. With the fluidity of Hybrid working, you are in danger of always being at work. There is something to be said for the traditional module of walking out of the office and

leaving your work at work. As Creatives, not often a way we are used to working, but with Hybrid life our already fluid approaches become dangerously continuous. How do we as creative parents wield this palette of priorities?

## 2. Blurring Boundaries

The home studio blurs the lines between work and personal life. The same space that witnesses' bedtime stories also hosts brainstorming sessions. How do we delineate these realms without losing our sense of self?

## 3. Spontaneity

The hybrid landscape, while liberating, can dampen spontaneity. The impromptu walk in the park, the chance encounter with inspiration—they become rarer. How do we preserve the serendipity that fuels our creativity?

## CONCLUSION

As a collective of creative parents, we realised that it is up to us to make sure that Hybrid working does not dictate our lives, that we allow it to boost our creativity and work, and we embrace it as a tool, not a way of life.

As a creative academic I am fortunate to witness how Hybrid working boosts my research, my pedagogy and my creative practice. I personally feel that this way of working has enhanced my career and allowed for me to have a family at the same time. Opportunities that would have been hard to navigate in person with a family schedule to consider, have been undertaken because an online option was available.

My creative outputs are now far more readily accessible to the wider world. I am currently generating a dance for film funded by Arts Council England, which is to be showcased in Baby Loss Awareness Week (October 2024) This work uses my personal story of losing two babies on my way to motherhood, an aspect of parenthood not so easily discussed. This film will be able to reach a larger audience because of the way we now are all used to disseminating knowledge and work. This project seems to be an amalgamation of the multiple roles I play. Its topic is at the heart of parenthood, it is embodied through my art form, it is captured for a digital world, and it will be distributed through platforms that have emerged because of the hybrid way we now live.

The Hybrid landscape in the UK is ever evolving. I for one look forward to seeing how it enhances, and how the next innovation will allow for more creative outputs and permit working parents to navigate life and work more seamlessly.

As the hues of creativity blend with the demands of a hybrid work environment, let us seek harmony. Creative parents, and professionals alike—may our symphony resonate with balance, nurturing both our artistry and our families.

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## NOTES

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