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HR for Hybrid Working: How to Adapt People Practices to Support Employees and the Organization written by Gary Cookson.
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ABSTRACT

This book is one of the timely published literatures on human resources management during and after COVID-19 where all the public and private organizations struggle to manage their human resources and day-to-day activities while keeping in mind infectious diseases. This book investigates into one of the most significant shifts in the workplace—hybrid working. With the COVID-19 pandemic acting as a catalyst, organizations across the region were forced to reconsider traditional office-based work models. This book provides practical insights and strategies for HR professionals who are navigating this transformation. Author Gary Cookson, an expert in human resources and leadership, offers actionable solutions to adjust people's practices to the demands of hybrid work. Hybrid work that combines remote and in-office working has become the new normal for many organizations after the pandemic. Companies have been trying to adapt without having solid resources that could give them direction and a road map to thrive in this new environment. Cookson begins by setting the stage, discussing how the shift to hybrid work has emerged from the disruption caused by the pandemic. He emphasizes that hybrid working is not a temporary trend but a fundamental change in how organizations operate. The book contextualizes hybrid work within a broader work environment, highlighting its potential to reshape organizational culture, employee engagement, and business practices.

Key word : *hybrid working, human resources, COVID-19 pandemic, office working, Recruitment*

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The author situates hybrid work as a flexible solution that addresses employees' demand for autonomy while balancing organizational needs. He also acknowledges the technological advancements that made this transition possible, such as video conferencing, collaboration tools, and cloud-based systems. By referencing research and real-world examples, Cookson solidifies the idea that hybrid work is here to stay, and HR must evolve to meet the challenges it presents. Still, many national and international organizations are following this model after the over of the pandemic.

This book highlights many key points through various case studies mentioned below:

Flexibility and Productivity

One of the central themes of the book is how organizations can strike a balance between flexibility and productivity in hybrid working models. Cookson recognizes that while hybrid work offers employees greater flexibility, it also raises concerns about maintaining productivity and accountability. The book outlines several strategies for managing flexible work arrangements without compromising performance. He highlights the importance of clear performance metrics, regular check-ins, and trust-based management. He discusses how HR professionals can develop systems that focus on outcomes rather than micromanaging employees' time. This shift towards results-oriented management is essential for hybrid models, where employees may not be present in the office.

Maintaining Organizational Culture

Cookson addresses the challenge of maintaining a cohesive organizational culture in a hybrid setting. With employees distributed across various locations, traditional methods of adopting culture—such as in-person meetings and office-based team-building activities—become less effective. Cookson argues that HR must play a proactive role in preserving culture by creating intentional touchpoints for collaboration and communication. He offers several practical suggestions for keeping employees engaged and aligned with company values, such as virtual team-building exercises, regular feedback loops, and promoting shared values through digital platforms. The book emphasizes that culture in a hybrid world requires deliberate effort and cannot be left to chance.

Employee Engagement and Well-being

The book explores how hybrid working models impact employee engagement and well-being. Cookson discusses the dual-edged nature of remote work—it can increase work-life balance but also lead to isolation, burnout, and disengagement if not managed properly. He advocates for HR to develop well-being programs that cater to the specific needs of remote and hybrid workers. Cookson stresses the importance of regular communication and check-ins to gauge employee sentiment. He also suggests using employee engagement surveys and pulse checks to ensure that HR has a real-time understanding of employee needs. Mental health support, flexible working hours, and fostering a sense of belonging are crucial elements in sustaining employee well-being in hybrid models.

HR's Role in Hybrid Work

The core of Cookson's book revolves around how HR professionals can adapt their people practices to support both employees and organizations in hybrid environments. The role of HR, according to Cookson, is evolving. HR is no longer just about policy-making; it is about shaping employee experiences in a way that aligns with the future of work.

Talent Management and Recruitment

Cookson emphasizes that hybrid work expands the talent pool, allowing organizations to recruit talent from across the globe. However, this also presents challenges in terms of recruitment processes and onboarding remote employees. He provides insights on how HR can adapt recruitment strategies to attract and retain talent in a hybrid work environment. This includes leveraging digital recruitment tools, virtual interviews, and remote onboarding processes. He also touches upon the importance of building an employer brand that resonates with remote workers. By offering flexible working arrangements, organizations can attract top talent who prioritize work-life balance and autonomy.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

In a hybrid workplace, traditional training and development programs need to be reimagined. Cookson discusses how HR can use technology to deliver training that is accessible to both in-office and remote employees. He encourages HR to invest in digital learning platforms that allow employees to develop skills at their own pace. The book stresses the importance of continuous learning in a hybrid model, where employees must stay adaptable to evolving technologies and work practices. This book addresses the role of leadership in hybrid work environments, particularly how leaders must be trained to manage distributed teams effectively. Leadership development programs should include remote management skills, communication strategies, and emotional intelligence training to ensure leaders are equipped to handle the unique challenges of hybrid work.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

One of the most complex areas HR must navigate in hybrid work is performance management. The author argues that traditional performance management systems, which often rely on physical presence, need to be overhauled. He suggests that HR should implement systems that prioritize results and outcomes rather than time spent in the office. The book provides actionable advice on setting clear expectations, using data to track performance, and offering regular feedback. Cookson highlights the importance of transparency and trust in managing remote employees. He encourages HR to build a performance culture that is adaptable to the hybrid model, where employees are empowered to work autonomously but are held accountable for their results.

Cookson's approach is practical and grounded in real-world examples, making the book accessible to HR professionals at all levels. He draws on case studies from organizations that have successfully implemented hybrid work models, offering insights that are both strategic and tactical. While the book is primarily solution-oriented, it also references research and data, ensuring that the advice is evidence-based. The strength of the book lies in its ability to combine theory with practice. Cookson not only discusses the theoretical implications of hybrid work but also provides concrete steps that HR can take to adapt their practices. His holistic approach covers various aspects of HR, from recruitment to performance management, making the book a comprehensive guide for navigating the hybrid work landscape.

While HR for Hybrid Working offers valuable insights, there are some areas where the book could have delved deeper. For instance, Cookson touches on the potential downsides of hybrid work, such as employee isolation and the erosion of work-life boundaries, but these topics could have been explored more thoroughly. A more detailed discussion on how organizations can mitigate these risks would have added depth to the book. Additionally, the book focuses primarily on knowledge-based industries where hybrid work is feasible. However, it could have addressed industries where hybrid work is more challenging, such as manufacturing or healthcare. Providing sector-specific examples or solutions could have broadened the book's applicability.

HR for Hybrid Working by Gary Cookson is an essential read for HR professionals who are grappling with the challenges of hybrid work. The book offers a comprehensive guide on how to adapt people practices to support both employees and organizations in this new landscape. With practical strategies, real-world examples, and evidence-based insights, Cookson provides HR with the tools needed to navigate the future of work successfully.

While the book could have explored certain challenges in more depth, its strengths lie in its actionable advice and holistic approach to HR. As hybrid work continues to evolve, HR for Hybrid Working will serve as a valuable resource for organizations looking to thrive in a flexible work environment.

Overall, this book is a valuable resource for HR professionals aiming to thrive in the evolving landscape of work and the shaping of the future of work within their organization during a pandemic or other normal times.