

Are hybrid work arrangements in the public sector fair and equitable? Examining perspectives of Ontario Public Servants.

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Submitted: 31 January 2025, Revised: 26 March 2025, Accepted: 21 April 2025, Published: 21 May 2025

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly transformed work arrangements and reshaped employees' expectations of their employers. In Canada's public sector, hybrid work, where employees alternate between office and home, has become the new norm. However, the fairness and equity of existing hybrid work arrangements remain understudied. For instance, in 2022, the Ontario Public Service (OPS) mandated three office days per week for all employees, but the latest OPS People Plan (2023-2026) lacks concrete commitments to hybrid work. This paper explores public servants' perspectives on the fairness and equity of hybrid work arrangements within the OPS. Specifically, it examines public servants' views on access to hybrid work arrangements, consistency in their implementation, and the impact of hybrid work on recruitment and retention. By analyzing Reddit posts from 627 OPS subreddit users collected in 2022 and 2023, the study addresses two research questions: 1) How do Ontario public servants interpret fairness and equity in the current hybrid work model? and 2) How can these interpretations inform potential changes in the Ontario Government's approach to hybrid work? The findings reveal vivid discussions on hybrid work arrangements, highlighting concerns with the existing approach as well as the operationalization and implementation of the hybrid work. From a fairness and equity perspective, several key aspects emerged: the uneven burden of hybrid work, lack of consistency in its implementation and enforcement, and the impacts on employee recruitment and retention. The study concludes that significant changes are needed in the OPS approach to hybrid work, starting with a thorough analysis and subsequent incorporation of public servants' perspectives on fairness and equity. This could determine if the Ontario government remains competitive in the digital age.

Keywords: hybrid work, public service, fairness, equity, Ontario

Research paper, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59490/dgo.2025.981>

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered where people work and they are looking for from a prospective employer. In Canada's public sector, the hybrid work model, where public servants alternate between working from the office and home, has become a permanent fixture (Charbonneau & Doberstein, 2024). Remote work, at least part of the week, is now seen as a right rather than a privilege (Gintova, 2024a; Deschênes, 2024; Williamson et al., 2022). With the exception of the United States, where President's recent executive order prescribed federal public servants to "return to work in-person at their respective duty stations on a full-time basis" (White House, 2025), governments in developed and developing countries are signalling that hybrid work is here to stay (Australian Government, 2023; Kleiman et al., 2023; UK Government, n.d.).

Nevertheless, despite claims that government employers are embracing hybrid work, it remains unclear if these arrangements are fair and equitable. For instance, in 2022, the Ontario Public Service (OPS) mandated that all employees, regardless of their position, work from the office three days a week (AMAPCEO, 2022). However, the latest *OPS People Plan* (2023-2026) does not include any commitments or guarantees regarding hybrid work. Additionally, since 2023, Ontario public servants have been required to attest to their presence in the office, which

public sector unions have criticized as micromanagement (AMAPCEO, 2023). Furthermore, union challenge of restricting remote work for unionized employees to two days per week because of the three days in the office mandate resulted in the arbitration in favour of the union's position (AMAPCEO, 2024).

It is apparent that fairness and equity in the way hybrid work model is designed can mean different things. Nevertheless, emerging research highlights the need to consider the diversity and needs of public servants while determining work arrangements in the public service post COVID-19 pandemic (Roy, 2022). However, the existing hybrid work model adopted by government employers lacks any anti-racism or diversity considerations, making public servants question the discrepancy between government rhetoric on anti-racism, equity, and diversity, and governments' actions contradicting this rhetoric (Leedham, 2023).

This article aims to explore public servants' perspectives on the fairness and equity of hybrid work arrangements within one of Canada's largest provincial public services -- the OPS. Building on a literature review of hybrid and flexible work arrangements in the public sector, it analyzes public servants' posts on Reddit—a platform where users can anonymously discuss topics in specialized communities (subreddits). Specifically, the study examines insights from 627 OPS subreddit users and addresses two research questions: 1) How do Ontario public servants interpret fairness and equity in the current hybrid work model? and 2) How can these interpretations inform potential changes in the Ontario Government's approach to hybrid work?

The article is structured as follows. First, it provides a literature review and identifies research gaps. Next, it describes the methodology, data collection procedures, and approach to data analysis. This is followed by a discussion of the findings and a conclusion that focuses on future research directions.

2. Literature review

2.1 Flexible work arrangements post COVID-19 pandemic

Scholarship on post-COVID-19 work arrangements in the public sector has recently flourished, with a particular focus on hybrid work arrangements (Champagne, Choinière, & Granja, 2023; Charbonneau & Doberstein, 2024; Deschênes, 2024; Gintova, 2024a, 2024b; Roy, 2022; Williamson et al., 2022). Although flexible work arrangements like telework, flexible hours, and compressed work week were available to public servants before the pandemic, many workers, especially managers and executives, realized the benefits of remote work while working from home during the pandemic (Yuan et al., 2023). Moreover, although the impacts of hybrid work on job satisfaction among public servants are still yet to be fully understood, emerging literature highlights increased performance and work-life balance while working remotely (Barbieri et al., 2024; Williamson et al., 2022). Finally, managing teams remotely and using technology for routine tasks such as meetings and virtual client visits have quickly replaced fully in-person interactions (Gintova, 2024a).

It is important to distinguish between pre-pandemic telework and the evolving hybrid work arrangements. While some scholars use these terms interchangeably or define telework simply as remote work, the public services in Canada have a distinct approach to hybrid work (Charbonneau & Doberstein, 2024). Specifically, hybrid work arrangements apply to all public servants, regardless of position, and are set by the government employer rather than negotiated through collective agreements between the government employer and public sector unions or between the government and an individual employee (Gintova, 2024a).

In Canada, the right to hybrid work has become a significant labor relations issue, with unions representing federal and provincial public servants demanding hybrid work guarantees for their members (Shingler, 2023). However, governments are still struggling to find the right mix of working from home and office (Roy, 2022), as evidenced by the constantly changing approaches to mandatory office presence at the federal level. Since the return to office began, the Government of Canada has changed its hybrid work policy three times: initially allowing individual government departments to determine their own arrangements, then mandating two to three days in the office, and now requiring three days in the office for non-executives and four days in the office for those in leadership positions (Government of Canada, 2024a). Therefore, the debate over the 'right' approach to hybrid work arrangements—balancing existing political constraints while allowing government agencies discretion in operationalization of the hybrid work arrangements—remains ongoing in Canada.

The Ontario Government's approach has remained consistent, requiring employees, regardless of their positions, to be in the office for at least three days unless another arrangement is agreed upon with their reporting manager. However, there are no formalized commitments guaranteeing Ontario public servants the right to remote work (AMAPCEO, 2023). This essentially means that only unionized workers have access to flexible work arrangements (negotiated with the employer pre-pandemic), while non-unionized employees can be required to return to office at any time. Despite this, access to flexible work arrangements, including remote work, is considered an important tool for attracting and retaining workers in the public service (Charbonneau & Doberstein, 2024). This is particularly crucial given the growing concern that governments in Canada are struggling to attract and retain

talent (IPAC, 2016).

2.2 Hybrid work: benefits and challenges

Although hybrid work in Canada is a relatively new phenomenon, studies like the one by Deloitte (2022), show that hybrid workers experience higher job satisfaction compared to other workers, but they also face the challenge of combining remote and in-person work models. The Government of Canada (2024b) claims that the current hybrid work model aims to “foster innovation, collaboration, and productivity” and can be tailored to meet the needs of federal organizations nationwide. However, hybrid work presents several challenges, particularly in implementation. These challenges include issues related to employee control and accountability (Charbonneau & Doberstein, 2024), managing employee expectations regarding onsite requirements (Deschênes, 2024), and a lack of strategic considerations (Lauring & Jonasson, 2025).

The most significant issue in navigating hybrid work arrangements is the current lack of operationalization. Existing research often defines “hybrid” as any work arrangement where employees alternate between working from the office and a non-office location (Lauring & Jonasson, 2025). Consequently, the optimal mix of in-office and remote workdays remains unclear. Despite this, public services in Canada have specified a concrete number of in-office days, but this operationalization lacks concrete evidence. As Charbonneau & Doberstein (2024) note, current hybrid work decisions in various Canadian public services, including the OPS, were made without productivity and efficiency analysis. Furthermore, despite a clear employee preference for remote work, the federal public service did not provide a justification for not considering these preferences before announcing the hybrid work policy (Gintova, 2024a). Similarly, the 2022 OPS Employee Experience survey revealed that 44% of respondents preferred remote work, while 41% favored hybrid work arrangements (Ontario Government, 2023a).

The absence of a strategic approach to hybrid work and the lack of concrete evidence supporting the current model pose significant challenges for the OPS. This also brings the discussion about its fairness and equity to the forefront.

2.3 Conceptualizing fairness and equity of hybrid work

The literature on fairness and equity in hybrid work arrangements within the public sector is notably scarce. Despite scholars' calls to consider the diverse needs of public servants when formulating hybrid work policies (Charbonneau & Doberstein, 2024; Gintova, 2024a; Roy, 2022), there remains a gap in understanding how these policies might disproportionately impact the careers of public servants from equity-seeking groups. Studies on the impacts of alternative work arrangements on public servants in Canada who identify as racialized, disabled, women, and Indigenous are limited, with the notable exception of Mullins et al. (2021), which examines the influence of alternative work arrangements on the work satisfaction and retention of public servants who are caregivers.

Emerging scholarship on fairness and equity in the post-COVID-19 work environment underscores its multifaceted nature (Aplin-Houtz et al., 2025; Lane & Aplin-Houtz, 2023). For example, Lane & Aplin-Houtz (2023) identify four types of justice perceived by workers: organizational justice, based on perceptions of decision-making; distributive justice, based on perceptions of resource allocation; procedural justice, based on perceptions of implied or inferred bias; and informational justice, based on the perceived adequacy, timeliness, and truthfulness of communicated information. Defining fairness and equity in hybrid work from an employer's perspective is challenging due to the lack of clear definitions in publicly available government documents outlining hybrid work arrangements. For instance, the Government of Canada (2024) claims that its *Common Hybrid Work Model* brings “greater fairness and consistency” to the operationalization of hybrid work across the federal government but does not specify what this entails. Although it does not directly address hybrid work, the *OPS People Plan* (2023-2026) describes an equitable organization as “inclusive, anti-racist, accessible, diverse, respectful, and free from workplace harassment and discrimination, and that supports well-being” (Ontario Government, 2023b).

In this paper, we aim to explore public servants' perspectives on fairness and equity of the existing hybrid work arrangements within the OPS. Specifically, we seek to understand perspectives on three key aspects of fairness and equity: access to hybrid work arrangements, consistency in implementation, and the impacts of hybrid work on OPS employee recruitment and retention.

3. Research design

This paper examines the perspectives shared by current and former public servants in Ontario Government. The OPS with over 60,000 employees is among largest and diverse employers in the province of Ontario and in Canada. The study employs computer-assisted and manual content analysis of Reddit data from the OPS subreddit – a community representing current and former Ontario public servants. It is important to note that although Reddit posts are typically anonymous (unless a user decides to identify themselves), Reddit quotes referenced below are further anonymized for ethical considerations (i.e. no usernames or data collection files are provided).

Analysing Reddit data to gain insights into professional communities is becoming increasingly popular among scholars (e.g. Aplin-Houtz et al., 2025; Gilbert, 2020; Gruzd et al., 2020; Lane & Aplin-Houtz, 2023). These studies demonstrated that these communities provide members with a space for in-depth discussions and advice. Additionally, members of professional communities on Reddit often possess significant expertise (Gruzd et al., 2020). However, Reddit's user base is predominantly white men, which limits the diversity of perspectives on the platform (Gilbert, 2020). Although it is impossible to comment on demographical composition of the OPS subreddit users, our research indicates that the voices of women and people of colour are somewhat represented on it. Nonetheless, we observe a lack of perspectives from racialized public servants.

For this study, we collected a total of 8,274 Reddit posts (4,251 from 2022 and 4,023 from 2023) from 627 unique users. Posts were gathered twice between March and May of each year to capture the periods when discussions about returning to the office and hybrid work were most intense, allowing for a comparative analysis one year into the implementation of hybrid work arrangements in the OPS. The data was collected using Communalystic, a research tool for collecting and analyzing social media data (Gruzd & Mai, 2021). The analysis combined computer-assisted sentiment analysis (using TextBlob and VADER via Communalystic) with toxicity analysis (using Detoxify via Communalystic). Additionally, a manual content analysis was conducted on 827 posts—representing 10% of the collected data—selected through systematic sampling, a widely used approach among scholars for manual coding of social media data (see, e.g., Gintova 2019). Toxicity analysis helped identify rude, disrespectful, or derogatory comments by subreddit members, which were assigned a Detoxify toxicity score over 0.3 (on a scale from 0 to 1) (Pascual-Ferrá et al., 2021). Sentiment analysis using both TextBlob and VADER was applied to interpret the emotions (positive, neutral, or negative) underlying opinions or statements on Reddit (Savela et al., 2021). This approach allowed us to compare the results and overcome the limitations of using a single sentiment analysis library. When referring to neutral or positive Reddit posts in the analysis below, we reference posts that both TextBlob and VADER identify as such (with scores ranging from -0.05 to 1, on a scale from -1 to +1).

Manual content analysis was conducted by three coders with professional experience in the public sector. Each year's posts were coded by two coders, with one coder participating in both years to ensure coding integrity and continuity. The coding book, developed during the initial coding period, was consistently applied in the second round of coding. Codes were assigned through a consensus approach, where coders collectively agreed on the best coding option for posts they initially coded differently. This method maintained coding integrity, as coders discussed emerging codes and themes and consistently applied the coding book (Appendix A).

4. Findings

The analysis shows that return to office and hybrid work arrangement discussions were major discussion topics for both years (49% of coded posts (N=209) for 2022 and 18% of coded posts (N=71) for 2023). Other notable topics included HR, careers, benefits, leadership, and (mental) health. The perspectives included these from public servants in unionized and non-unionized positions (e.g. management viewpoints were represented well). Most of the conversations focused on the concerns of working onsite, operationalization and implementation as well as enforcement of hybrid work arrangements, and resisting working from the office. Discussions on benefits of hybrid work were mostly non-existent. Overall, posts were generally non-toxic and neutral were generally non-toxic and neutral in nature. **Fig. 1** compares hybrid work discussion topic/themes for 2022 and 2023. Below, we focus specifically on concerns, operationalization and implementation as well as enforcement conversations which were focused on the most notable aspects of fairness and equity in the context of hybrid work.

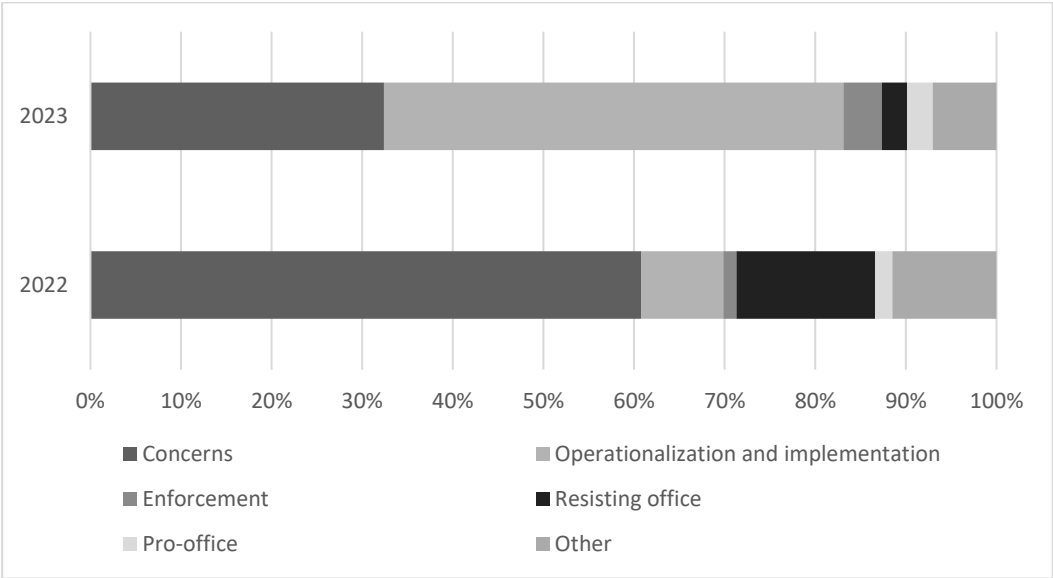


Fig. 1 - Topics/themes for OPS subreddit posts on hybrid work for 2022 and 2023

4.1. Concerns with unfair burdens of hybrid work

Concerns with unfair burdens of hybrid work echoed those noted by Williamson et al. (2022) to a certain extent. Public servants noted that working from office is less desirable for women who are caregivers. However, they also noted that white men in the positions of power benefit the most from the existing OPS hybrid work model. The first two quotes speak to uneven impacts of hybrid work on women and men and the last one highlights the interplay between hybrid work, power, and systemic racism.

Exactly! [Men] are rarely the ones impacted [by work arrangements] especially when the children are sick. Men always find any excuse to get out of the house. My SO always finds excuses to go to the store so he can disappear for a couple hours LOL (OPS member, 2023).

I'm terrified to go into the office, especially as a pregnant person who will be taking public transit. With the 6th wave [of COVID-19] it feels like there is zero way to keep myself safe, even if I wear my mask as much as possible. How on earth do I keep hydrated and eat in a crowded office without being scared of taking my mask off?! (OPS member, 2022).

It's called systemic racism, look it up. [E]very powerful position in my organization is a white, middle-aged male. That isn't by accident. They benefit from a great deal of privilege which is furthered by [working from the office]. They all can afford to have multiple family cars, private parking spots, can afford extra childcare and all of the other costs assumed by going into office (OPS member, 2023).

The lack of equity and diversity considerations in the Ontario Government's "one-size-fits-all" three-day office mandate is particularly significant. This issue is compounded by the absence of evidence supporting the government's hybrid work policy, as noted by Charbonneau & Doberstein (2024). OPS members feel they are merely pawns in the government's effort to revitalize the downtown core. The following quote encapsulates this perspective:

Those [executives] get their orders from [Premier] Ford and that dumb [Secretary of Cabinet] to push us back into buildings run by giant corporations. There's too much at stake for those companies if we're allowed to work from home or if [return to office] is optional. We're just pawns here. (OPS member, 2023)

As implemented, the existing hybrid work arrangements could further contribute to disproportionately negative impacts on the careers of racialized Ontario public servants, particularly those who identify as women. These perspectives are crucial for understanding the impacts of current hybrid work arrangements. However, this important viewpoint was represented by only two posts on the OPS subreddit. This can be partially explained by the under-representation of racialized public servants in roles where working from home was possible during the pandemic and/or their reluctance to voice their opinions and concerns on the subreddit. It can also be attributed to the limited representation of this group on the OPS subreddit and Reddit more broadly.

4.2. Lack of consistency in implementation

Although discussions about the operationalization and implementation of the three-day office mandate dominated conversations in 2023, it is crucial to note that inconsistencies in its application began in 2022. OPS members noted varying space capacities across different office buildings, leading to initial inconsistencies in the mandate's implementation. This brought up the argument that public servants can "vote with their feet" and consider joining the ministry with more relaxed office presence requirements. The quotes below highlight lack of space for some ministries.

[Three days in the office] is literally impossible in many workplaces due to not having enough space/desks to accommodate people (OPS member, 2022).

I have heard rumours of teams that continue to work fully remotely or managers that don't really care or pay attention to how often folks are in or areas that go twice per week due to space limitations. But I wouldn't count on finding somewhere that deviates from the direction (OPS member, 2023).

In 2023, discussions about inconsistent implementation were further enriched by comparing the number of days managers and unionized staff spent in the office. Although no specific requirements were noted in official Ontario government communication, OPS members expressed concerns that this expectation could deter one from pursuing leadership opportunities. The quotes below highlight the issue:

Yes, [my manager] goes in at least 3 days per week, if not more. I also know other Managers that also go in 4-5 days per week. This is not the case for all though (OPS member, 2023).

Lastly, it is important to remember that some OPS roles positions (especially, front line and administrative roles) do not allow for hybrid work arrangements. The quote below emphasizes this:

Ministries have been directed to have folks in-office three days per week. [Of course] there are also roles that require being on site 100% of the time (OPS member, 2023).

Overall, one year into the implementation of the mandatory three-day office mandate, inconsistencies in its operationalization among the ministries persisted. While limited office space can be seen as an external factor constraining management's options, the most frequently discussed issue was the varying leadership approaches between ministries and even within the same ministry. These discrepancies are also evident in the inconsistencies in enforcement, which we discuss next.

4.3. Lack of consistency in enforcement

As noted above, in 2023, Ontario government has required its employees to attest their onsite presence. Despite the goal being to yield consistency in office presence across the OPS, the OPS members highlighted individual discretion of leadership in interpreting what constitutes onsite presence and enforcing the requirement. Two quotes below talk about employee experiences in two different ministries.

You're right. I have a former coworker who is now a manager in a [ministry]. They have told me about this attestation form. The way they handle it is they tell their staff the policy is 3 days a week, but then don't check into it any further than that. Essentially turning a blind eye to it while still maintaining the company line. Also, they have staff who simply ask to [work from home] for medical reasons every single week. My manager friend simply says yes and maintains they still are following policy because medical accommodations and flexibility are encouraged (and who is my manager friend to argue about medical need? They aren't a doctor!) (OPS member 2023)

It's ludicrous how inconsistent it is across ministries, and even within ministries. We sign attestations in my ministry too - but there is no stipulation that [alternative work arrangements] must be pre covid (at least not in my area) and lots of staff have formally requested (and been granted) them for less than 3 days.

This underscores a significant issue within the OPS: the potential for inconsistent treatment of employees based on individual managers' enforcement approaches. Furthermore, the existing hybrid work model's lack of consideration for systemic racism, diversity, and inclusion can exacerbate discriminatory practices by managers, who have the authority to determine their employees' work locations.

4.4. Hybrid work's impact on recruitment and retention

Finally, the current OPS hybrid work model inadvertently excludes individuals living in remote locations without OPS offices from applying for or advancing in their OPS careers. While some OPS members noted inconsistencies in granting employees the opportunity to work fully remotely as part of initial employment contract negotiations, many highlighted career limitations due to the office attendance requirement. The first quote illustrates the possibility of securing a fully remote position despite the mandate, while the second quote discourages a member from seeking promotional opportunities in a specific ministry.

When I got hired (externally) I told the hiring manager I had to be 100% remote or I would decline the offer. It was in my cover letter too. No [alternative work arrangements]. I just work too far (OPS member, 2023).

Must not be [Ministry X]. In [Ministry X] the managers have to sign monthly attestations that they have forced all their staff back 3 days per week.

Members also highlighted that they were looking for completely remote work options as these provide better work-life balance and improve their well-being. The quote below summarizes this viewpoint:

So now I'm looking for fully remote positions. And that's taking a lot of my time so I can have more music time. Apparent in this comment, no kids. This doesn't also factor in other obligations so I'm constantly doing mental scheduling acrobatics when things come up so I can do what I need to (OPS member, 2023).

Finally, for some, the mandatory three-day office requirement has led them to reconsider their career choices and question their future within the OPS. As one member noted:

I no longer care for or about a career in the OPS & actively tell people thinking about joining (the very few that could actually be good at the job & qualified) that they would have a WAY better time/career anywhere else. As a recent post-graduate, there are a lot of better options out there where you can look forward to more than stagnant wages & a useless pin after 25 years of service, and avoid the nonsensical, soul-sucking, expensive commutes in the meantime. More importantly, you won't be embarrassed being used as a puppet for our corrupt leaders!! Great job "putting people first" OPS (sarcasm), you have us lining up to be the first out the door!! (OPS member, 2022).

Discussions on the OPS subreddit reveal that flexibility in choosing work locations is a crucial factor for current and prospective OPS employees when considering employment opportunities. While it is unclear how many of these employees, who prefer remote work, are managers or are actively seeking career advancement, work-life balance and mental well-being are consistently highlighted as key characteristics of remote work.

4.5. Sentiment and toxicity of discussions on hybrid work

The general sentiment of Reddit posts on hybrid work in the OPS community was neutral or positive (54%), with toxic posts accounting for 8%. Most toxic posts (N = 11) appeared in March 2022, the month following the announcement of the mandated return to the office for at least three days a week. Ontario public servants learned about this announcement from the news rather than through direct communication from the OPS employer (Gintova, 2024a), therefore, it is not surprising that they were very unhappy and frustrated.

Since toxic posts discourage participation or cause people to leave an online conversation, the OPS subreddit is a well-maintained community. This can be attributed in part to the active moderation of the subreddit, where moderators remove posts that violate established rules. Additionally, OPS members are not only willing and able to express their viewpoints but are also open to considering others' perspectives.

It is also important to note that OPS members primarily expressed displeasure with the OPS leadership team, particularly the Secretary of Cabinet, and how she handled the issue. They were also discontented with the lack of opposition to political demands and the inability of directors and assistant deputy ministers to defend the interests of their teams. Finally, in 2023, toxic posts criticized the lack of leadership long-term commitment to hybrid work and expressed frustration that employees' needs were continuously being disregarded by the employer.

5. Discussion

The results of the study demonstrate that hybrid work was a prominent discussion topic in the OPS public servant community in 2022 and 2023. The conversations on the OPS subreddit provide important insights for answering the study's two research questions: 1) How do Ontario public servants interpret fairness and equity in the current hybrid work model? and 2) How can these interpretations inform potential changes in the Ontario Government's approach to hybrid work?

Public servants discuss fairness and equity from both employee and employer perspectives. From the employee perspective, fairness and equity are primarily viewed through the lenses of procedural and distributive justice (Lane & Aplin-Houtz, 2023). Specifically, OPS members noted that men, particularly white middle-aged men, tend to benefit the most from being in the office, highlighting the need for procedural justice considerations. Additionally, OPS members residing in remote communities in Ontario emphasized that fully remote work is the only option due to the lack of physical offices in their locations, thus focusing on the resource allocation aspect of distributive justice. From the employer perspective, as the Ontario Government's view of fairness resembles that of the federal government – i.e. similar working arrangements implemented across the government – OPS members focused on the lack of consistency in implementation and enforcement, not just across Ontario ministries but sometimes within the same ministry. Discussions on the subreddit highlighted the varying capacities of ministries to accommodate their workforce in the office, the significant discretion in allowing remote work beyond two days a week and the enforcement of mandatory attendance, and the possibility of "voting with their feet" by seeking opportunities within ministries that are more flexible with alternative work arrangement agreements.

Despite calls by scholars to consider the expectations (Deschênes, 2024), needs and the diversity within the public service (Roy 2022), and the potential disproportionate impacts current arrangements might have on racialized employees (Gintova 2024a) while implementing hybrid work arrangements, it is apparent that Ontario Government have not done any of these. Moreover, the most recent human resources strategy – *OPS People Plan (2023-2026)* – excludes any references to hybrid work completely, while underscoring the OPS employer aspiration to "create an equitable organization" (Ontario Government 2023b). Nevertheless, as the results of the study show, OPS subreddit members consider hybrid work to be an integral component of the human resources strategy. As noted above, some OPS members viewed the opportunity for less presence in the office as an important factor in determining whether they will pursue OPS employment or career advancement opportunities.

Therefore, we emphasize that in order to be a competitive employer and continue on its quest to creating an equitable organization, Ontario Government should rethink its approach to hybrid work. It is quite clear from the results of the study that maintaining status quo could potentially lead to the loss of talent and further decrease in job satisfaction (Gintova 2024b). It is also unclear whether the status quo will continue to disproportionately impact careers and work conditions of the racialized public servants, especially those who identify as women and those who are employed in the positions requiring constant onsite presence. As noted in Gintova (2024a), a comprehensive and transparent gender-based analysis plus can be a good starting point to comprehensively understand equity and fairness of hybrid work through an intersectionality lens.

Furthermore, hybrid work approach needs be grounded in evidence (Charbonneau & Doberstein, 2024). However, this evidence should not include solely operational requirements but an analysis of employees' perspectives and needs. Employee viewpoints on fairness and equity of hybrid work arrangements, as highlighted by this study, are crucial for employing multiple lens to determine what constitutes a fair and equitable hybrid work model. In addition, it is also important to consider for the hybrid work approach to allow for individual ministries' flexibility to customize it (Gintova, 2024a, Roy, 2022) given that this already happening but organically as opposed to strategically. This will also create incentive for leadership within individual ministries to take stake over their approach to employee engagement and development.

Finally, the *OPS People Plan (2023-2026)* must include concrete commitments to hybrid work. Strategically positioning hybrid work within existing human resource strategies and policies will signal its permanence, regardless of political preferences. Currently, alternative work arrangements, including partial or full-time remote work, are formally available only to unionized employees. A commitment to hybrid work for all OPS employees would demonstrate the employer's broader dedication to fairness and equity in the workplace.

6. Conclusion and future research

This study offers a number of important scholarly and practitioner contributions. From the scholarly perspective, it begins to unpack the concepts of fairness and equity in the context of the hybrid work arrangements in the public sector. It is important to note that, as the results of the study show, these are multi-dimensional and need to be understood both from the public servants' and government employer perspectives. However, further research is required to delve into the perspectives of racialized public servants on fairness and equity of hybrid work in the public sector as Reddit data might not contain those due to platform representativeness limitations.

Second, the study builds on the emerging body of literature on hybrid work in the public service post-pandemic and examines perspectives and sentiments of public servants on hybrid work arrangements between two years. Although we do not note significant change in sentiment surrounding hybrid work between 2022 and 2023, it is important to highlight that the discussions surrounding the issue have shifted from primarily concerns with the approach adopted by government to how the hybrid work arrangements are operationalized, implemented, and enforced. With the specific emphasis on the lack of consistency in implementation and enforcement.

Third, the methodology applied in this study can be adapted for future research in public policy and administration. Specifically, professional communities on Reddit can offer valuable insights into various policy and public administration issues, supporting government decision-making. However, it is crucial to recognize the limitations of Reddit data as previously discussed and to corroborate these findings with other data sources. This is particularly important for research on hybrid work in government. It is essential to include the perspectives of public servants from equity-seeking groups, as the challenges they face may differ from those encountered by non-marginalized public servants.

For practitioners, this study offers a number of considerations and recommendations for hybrid work implementation. First and foremost, existing literature (Charbonneau & Doberstein, 2024) and the results of this study highlight the need for a strategic approach to hybrid work. Without this, governments as employers risk underutilizing benefits of this post-pandemic work arrangement as well as pushback from public servants who might feel that hybrid work arrangements are not a permanent fixture.

Second, hybrid work arrangements should become an integral part of the human resource strategies and policies. As employees no longer view hybrid work as a privilege (Gintova, 2024a; Deschênes, 2024; Williamson et al., 2022), it is crucial to manage the employer's expectation that they can unilaterally determine how hybrid work arrangements are designed and implemented, especially considering the concern that governments in Canada are struggling to attract and retain talent (IPAC, 2016).

Finally, hybrid work arrangements must be based on evidence rather than political agendas. Continued failing to correct this could lead to increased employee dissatisfaction with public service leadership and a loss of talent to other opportunities. Moreover, this could impede the implementation of transformation initiatives, including digital government transformation, thereby obstructing the achievement of these initiatives' intended objectives.

In conclusion, the hybrid work model post-COVID-19 presents both unique challenges and opportunities for governments. However, the examination of this issue by practitioners and scholars should not only focus on the pros and cons of the new workplace model but also address the existing barriers to its fair and equitable implementation.

Acknowledgement

- **Funding or Grant:** This study is funded by XXX (removed for review)
- **Contributor Statement*:** removed for review
- **Use of AI*:** During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Microsoft Copilot in order to edit and proofread the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the author(s) further reviewed and edited the manuscript, and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.
- **Conflict Of Interest (COI):** There is no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A. Coding Book

Topic/theme	Additional topics/themes	Sample post
Hybrid work	Concerns/ fairness	We're constantly guilty about our carbon footprint, emissions and climate change yet we need to head back to the office...to support downtown businesses? Employers and the government have exposed their hypocrisy and ineffectual tactics.
	Operationalization/ implementation	It is more expensive because you would need to park in the visitor parking. I believe it's like \$23 a day. During COVID when we were going 1-2 times a week, Unit park had allowed sharing as long as both staff were not parked in the lot at the same time but now with the 3 days it doesn't work out because there will always be one day overlap.
	Resisting office	Return to the office: a slap in the face. We often talk our frustrations, but we do nothing. How can we organize and protest this? Ideally, if people have the guts, we should all stay home on the days we are supposed to go back to the office. They can't fire us all. Together we could effect change.
	Enforcement	In Health all managers must sign an attestation every month that their staff are attending 3x week (except where there are accommodations, pre-covid-awa, or insufficient space to permit it). Managers who knowing lie when they sign the attestation are putting their jobs on the line.
	Supporting return to office	I think a lot of people on the sub have to remember, for the last two years those whom have dreaded going back have not been bothering their managers with "When will we not have to go back to the office" whereas people like me have been vocal about their design TO return to the office... Squeaky wheel and all. There might also be an implicit bias to the reddit community- or even your friend circle that would lead you to believe no one wants to return... but you might just not be surrounded by those people.
	Other	"Interesting that Millhouse says people need to go the office then points out he's working from home. And the other dude is off base saying PSAC needs to be begging for their jobs and become HR directors."