

THE FUTURE OF WORK: Managing Fluid Work Identities in Hybrid Organizations

1. Problems Addressed, Aim, and Research Questions

Work is undergoing a fundamental transformation. Traditional job roles, once stable and clearly defined, are becoming fluid, dynamic, and project-based. Employees increasingly move across teams, tasks, and even employment types (full-time, gig, AI-assisted work). Hybrid work environments and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) further accelerate this shift.

This creates a major management challenge: organizations are still structured around fixed roles, while work itself is no longer fixed.

Managers struggle to define responsibilities, evaluate performance, and maintain engagement when roles are constantly evolving. Employees, in turn, experience both increased autonomy and increased uncertainty.

Aim: This study aims to explore how managers can effectively lead and structure work in environments where roles are fluid rather than fixed.

Research Questions: 1. How do fluid work roles affect employee identity, performance, and well-being? 2. How can managers create clarity and accountability in flexible work structures? 3. What management practices are most effective in hybrid and project-based environments?

2. Justification and Importance

This research is highly relevant to both scholars and practitioners. The shift toward hybrid work, gig work, and AI-supported work is redefining how organizations operate.

For managers: - Provides guidance on leading teams without fixed roles - Supports better decision-making in uncertain environments

For organizations: - Helps redesign performance management systems - Improves productivity and adaptability

For employees: - Reduces confusion and role ambiguity - Supports well-being and engagement

This study aligns with the EMS 2026 theme of “Bright Ideas, Lasting Impact” by addressing a real-world problem with direct implications for organizational effectiveness and human outcomes.

3. Theoretical Basis

This study integrates three key theoretical perspectives:

Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964): Explains how individuals understand expectations associated with their roles. In fluid environments, role ambiguity increases, affecting performance and satisfaction.

Identity Theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989): Explores how individuals form a sense of self through their work. Fluid roles may challenge identity stability but also enable identity growth.

Future of Work Literature: Highlights trends such as hybrid work, gig work, and AI integration, emphasizing flexibility, autonomy, and continuous change (Parker & Grote, 2022).

Together, these frameworks support a new conceptual view of management as a process of guiding evolving roles rather than enforcing fixed structures.

4. Research Design

This study adopts a **mixed-methods approach** to capture both depth and generalizability.

Phase 1: Qualitative Study - Semi-structured interviews with managers and employees - Focus on experiences with role fluidity, challenges, and strategies

Analysis: - Thematic analysis to identify patterns and key themes

Phase 2: Quantitative Study - Survey measuring: - Role clarity - Job performance - Stress and well-being - Perceived managerial support

Analysis: - Regression and correlation analysis to test relationships

This design allows for both exploratory insights and empirical validation.

5. Intended Data Sample

The study will include: - 100–150 professionals

Across industries: - Technology - Education - Consulting

Participants will include: - Managers - Employees working in hybrid or flexible work settings

Sampling will focus on individuals experiencing role fluidity in their daily work.

6. Preliminary Findings (Expected)

Based on existing literature and early observations:

- Fluid roles increase flexibility and autonomy
- Role ambiguity leads to stress and reduced clarity
- Managers lack structured approaches to managing fluid work

These findings suggest a need for new management frameworks that balance flexibility with clarity.

7. Discussion and Practical Importance

This study contributes to both theory and practice.

Theoretical Contribution: - Extends role and identity theory into dynamic work environments - Proposes a shift from “role management” to “role orchestration”

Practical Contribution:

Managers should: - Focus on outcomes rather than fixed job descriptions - Communicate evolving expectations clearly - Support continuous learning and adaptation

Organizations should: - Redesign performance systems around flexibility - Encourage cross-functional and project-based work

This research provides actionable insights for managing the future of work in a way that supports both performance and well-being.

8. Conceptual Framework (Visual Model)

FLUID WORK ENVIRONMENT ↓ [Role Flexibility] → [Employee Autonomy] ↓ ↓ [Role Ambiguity] → [Stress / Uncertainty] ↓ ↓ →→→ MANAGERIAL PRACTICES →→→ (clarity, communication, support) ↓ [Performance + Well-being]

9. References (APA Style)

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