

Can a hybrid workplace model save Dhaka from losing work hours?

A hybrid workplace paradigm offers employees freedom and support by combining in-person and remote work. More autonomy and a better work-life balance increase employee engagement in a mixed workplace. Employers gain from developing a more dependable, productive, and healthier workforce.

ESRAT SADIYA

If you are a working individual, you may have also complained about the terrible traffic in Dhaka when commuting to work lately. The persistent heat and terrible rain have exacerbated the situation. Bangladesh is squandering over 82 lakh working hours every day, according to a recent BSS News article. Dhaka's traffic congestion is expected to cost the economy \$6.5 billion a year in lost productivity, fuel waste, and health costs, according to the BUET-run Accident Research Institute (ARI). This indirectly reduces the country's GDP by 6 to 10 percent yearly.

Ahmad Saif, an employee from a tech-based sister concern of a well-known airline, claims that the gridlock and hours of waiting in traffic from Mirpur to Tejgaon-Gulshan Link Road wear him out and reduce his productivity. Not only him, but every worker will be aware of the pressing problem; this is not an isolated incident.

What potential solution is there for this issue? What are some strategies to increase output while decreasing time? The solution lies in the idea of a hybrid workplace.

A hybrid workplace paradigm offers employees freedom and support by combining in-person and remote work. More autonomy and a better work-life balance increase employee engagement in a mixed workplace. Employers gain from developing a more dependable, productive, and healthier workforce.

Recent global surveys highlight that a significant majority of high-growth companies have adopted hybrid work models. An international survey highlighted that 63% of high-growth companies have adopted hybrid work models. In these transformative times, such strategies are not mere luxuries but necessities. A recent BBC report states that between 2020 and 2022, more than half

of Iceland's workforce had accepted the offer of reduced hours, including four-day work weeks. By last year, Iceland's economy expanded by an impressive 5%, outpacing most European countries.

According to the research by Iceland's Association for Sustainability and Democracy (Alda), key findings into these reduced work hours paint a compelling picture. 62% of workers on reduced hours reported being more satisfied with their schedules. On the economic end, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) noted Iceland's strong economic performance, highlighting its exceptional growth rate compared to European peers, despite the global economic challenges facing other nations.

Is this model, though, relevant to every industry, and particularly in Bangladesh? According to Ahmad, this will be tremendously beneficial for tech-related businesses. "It will be more efficient for us to complete our task in three days while working from home for two days. This will save us time and energy and ultimately boost our productivity. Also, if offices

coordinate and allow employees to attend in-person offices on alternating days, traffic can be considerably reduced."

It does, however, have some drawbacks. "It is not practical for production and

sales-based businesses like us", according to A S M Sadman Sakib, Deputy Manager of Production at a reputable global corporation. "Even if all of our machines are fully automated, we still need to work in person. On the other hand, if we can develop a workforce capable of concurrently maintaining operations during our absence, we see the potential to transition to a somewhat hybrid approach."

There are a few drawbacks to working-from-home adoption. These include inadequate infrastructure, unreliable internet access, loneliness, excessive screen time, an unbalanced work-life schedule owing to irregular work hours, low employee engagement, and a decreased sense of camaraderie among coworkers. Conversely, it gives workers more freedom to spend time with their families and has also encouraged companies to realise that many tasks can be completed just as well from home.

However, the question still stands: given the benefits and drawbacks of the hybrid workplace model in a city like Dhaka where

traffic congestion greatly reduces productivity at work and costs time, could a well-balanced hybrid approach help to truly improve work-life balance while also increasing productivity? Time will tell.



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

JOBS SPOTLIGHT

UNDP

Youth Engagement Analyst

Deadline: November 1

Eligibility:

Master's degree or equivalent in Law, Public Administration, Political Science, Economics, Development Studies, Public Policy, International Relations, Human Rights, or any other relevant field.

Minimum experience: 2-4 years



Standard Chartered Bank



Analyst, Credit Initiation

Deadline: October 30

Eligibility:

University degree with a major in Business Administration, Finance, Accounting, Economics, or related disciplines.

Minimum experience: 1-2 years

Wipro

Operations Support System Engineer



Deadline: N/A

Eligibility:

Bachelor of Science (BSc) in CS/ CSE with experience in application management in a large organisation.

Minimum experience: 3-5 years

Pathao

Senior Software Engineer (Backend)



Deadline: October 30

Eligibility:

Prior experience in backend development, with a strong focus on PHP and related frameworks (Laravel, Symfony, etc.).

Minimum experience: 5 years

FOR MORE DETAILS AND THE APPLICATION LINKS, SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.



"If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself."

HENRY FORD

Driving sustainable growth in Bangladesh's garment sector through local service providers

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

The RMG sector remains one of the most significant sectors in the economy of Bangladesh, employing millions and contributing substantially to GDP. Industry leaders have been increasingly aware of the need for improvement in workforce skills, productivity, and inclusion, particularly at the entry and semiskilled levels. This realisation has driven collaboration with international agencies, local consultancy firms, and garment factories themselves to explore customised training programs that address the same with sustainability.

Historically, factories in Bangladesh have depended on international consultancy firms to deliver customised, workplace-based training programs, which, although effective, came at a high operational cost. The high cost of training services has often deterred smaller factories from providing training to upskill their workforce. One might ask, if there is demand for such services, why haven't local firms ramped up efforts to offer them? The answer lies in the significant risk and investment required to launch such services, which many local consultancy firms lack the capacity to undertake. To address this challenge, the Building Youth Employability Through Skills (BYETS) project by Swisscontact began collaborating with local consultancy firms, first by building their capacity to deliver high quality training and sharing financial risk as they reach out to various factories to market their services.

The initiative has a twofold objective: first, to foster an environment where local firms can build stronger reputations, networks, and service sales with factories; and second, to increase factories' awareness of the service packages offered by local providers, ultimately reducing the industry's reliance on foreign consultants and lowering operational costs. Local consultancies are also seeing their business expand dramatically through these programmes, earning the trust of factories and building networks that facilitate further development opportunities.

Jamshed Al Zubaidi, Project Manager at Triangulum, a local firm that partnered with the project, says,

"Collaborating with the BYETS project has allowed us to share risks and establish a dedicated training services wing within the RMG sector. By expanding our outreach to Tier 1 and Tier 2 RMG factories, we have gained valuable exposure within the industry."

For workers, it is transformative, too. Belal Hossin, a master trainer at Karim Textiles Limited, spoke about how the moment he went through this training programme was a turning point in his career. "I started off as a senior operator only a year ago," he said, "but after the training, everything changed." Hossin and five colleagues from the company underwent intensive training that equipped them to train ten batches of factory employees to become master trainers. "Eight of these batches were related to technical skills, while two offered a multiskilled approach," he explained.

Currently, seven local consultancy service providers are delivering training on Sewing Methodology Training (SMT), Low Performance Improvement (LPI), and Productivity Improvement in 22 factories across the Dhaka and Chittagong divisions, with a target to reach 40 factories by the end of 2026. Several providers have already reported developing new service packages for these factories since they began collaborating with BYETS.

The demand for consultancy-led, workforce-oriented training mirrors a bigger industry movement toward greater inclusion and sustainability. Factories that have adopted these training models talk of measurable improvements in productivity and product quality and overall worker morale. Industry leaders believe that such initiatives not only address the immediate operational needs but also lay the foundation for a much more resilient and adaptive workforce moving forward as the sector evolves.

With that prospect of continued development and the implantation of digital learning solutions, these local service providers are expected to extend their reach and ensure training access, even in the most remote regions. This model shows how industry-wide collaborations can strengthen local consultancies, advance the workforce, and place Bangladesh's RMG sector at the forefront of sustainable and inclusive growth.

Microsoft CEO Satya earned \$79.1 million in 2024, filings reveal

NEXT STEP DESK

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella's annual compensation rose significantly to \$79.1 million for fiscal year 2024, marking a 63% increase from the previous year. The increase, disclosed in a company filing last week, is attributed primarily to stock awards, which surged as Microsoft's market valuation surpassed \$3 trillion.

Nadella's stock-based compensation grew to approximately \$71 million, up from \$39 million in 2023. His total earnings in fiscal 2023



OpenAI.

In addition to stock awards, Nadella received a cash incentive of \$5.2 million, less than the \$10.7 million he was eligible for. The CEO reportedly requested a reduction in light of several cybersecurity breaches reported during the fiscal year.

Nadella's compensation ranks high among leading tech executives. For comparison, Apple's CEO Tim Cook earned \$63.2 million in 2023, while Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, whose company dominates the AI-chip market, received \$34.2 million for fiscal 2024.

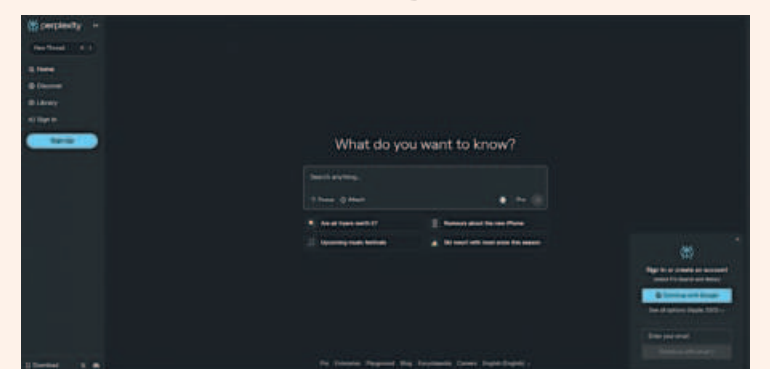
were reported at \$48.5 million. Microsoft's shares gained 31.2% in the fiscal year ending 30 June 2024, a boost driven partly by the company's strategic investment in

Perplexity AI in talks to raise valuation to \$8 billion in new funding round

NEXT STEP DESK

Perplexity AI, the artificial intelligence company backed by Jeff Bezos, has entered fundraising talks to more than double its valuation to over \$8 billion, according to a report by The Wall Street Journal. The company is reportedly seeking to raise around \$500 million in the new funding round.

This potential increase in valuation comes as Perplexity AI continues to attract investor interest. The company, which is also backed by Nvidia, has seen rapid growth, with its estimated annualised revenue reaching approximately \$50



million based on recent sales figures.

The move signals confidence from investors in Perplexity AI's ability to compete in the rapidly expanding AI industry. The talks

come as artificial intelligence companies worldwide are seeing a surge in demand and investment amid advances in machine learning and AI technologies.