

Developing a Conceptual Framework for Career Shock among Fresh Graduates in Hybrid Work Environments.

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Abstract:

Purpose: This paper seeks to establish a conceptual framework to make sense of career shock in the new graduate workforce in hybrid office settings. Hybrid work models are becoming more popular and are drastically changing early career experiences, resulting in issues to do with role clarity, digital skills and adaptation to the workplace.

Methodology: The research is conceptual research design using systematic literature review that was published between 2016 and 2026. Narrative synthesis method is applied to analyze around 20 academic sources, such as journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and doctoral studies. Some of the keywords will be career shock, hybrid work, fresh graduates, role ambiguity and psychological strain.

Findings: The research singles out hybrid nature of work, role ambiguity and digital skills gap as key antecedents that determine career shock. The mechanisms of these factors are mediated by like variables of adjustment to the workplace and psychological strain. These relationships are found to be mediated by organizational support and personal abilities, such as self-efficacy.

Implications: The framework offers a valuable contribution to HR professionals through its stress on the need to have a structured onboarding process, ongoing training, and supportive organizational practices to minimize early career disturbances.

Originality/Value: The research is a new combination of hybrid work and career shock and provides a multidimensional conceptual model, which may form the basis of future empirical research....

Keywords: Career shock, Hybrid work environments, Fresh Graduates, human resource management and organizational psychology...

INTRODUCTION

The college transition into the labor market is a very crucial process in a career of an individual, which is most of the time filled with uncertainties, difficulties in adapting, and changing expectations. This shift has only been aggravated in recent years by the development of hybrid workplaces, a hybrid arrangement of remote and in-person workplaces. The employment of hybrid work, which has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has essentially transformed the conventional workplace layout, intercourse patterns, and the employee encounter (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021; Purvanova and Mitchell, 2025). Although hybrid work provides several benefits like flexibility and independence, it also presents several challenges, including lowered face-to-face interaction, decreased informal learning, and increased use of digital tools, which could be especially challenging to fresh graduates entering the workforce (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021; Anoopa, 2025). Early-career employees commonly found in fresh graduates do not have hands-on work experience and depend on formalized processes of guidance and mentoring in socializing to the organizations. Nevertheless, these processes can be disrupted in a hybrid work environment, causing confusion, stress, and uncorrelated expectations and reality (Link, 2023; Park et al., 2025). A career shock can be applied to explain this phenomenon and describes the unexpected and disruptive events or experiences that can have a profound impact on the career trajectory and perceptions of an individual (Greičiūtė, 2023; Izogo et al., 2025). Although the concept of hybrid work and its effects on early career development is increasingly becoming relevant, the current body of literature concentrates mainly on these phenomena in isolation without paying much attention to the aspects of how a hybrid work environment may lead to career shock in fresh graduates.

This is necessary due to the complexity of early career transitions that occur in digitally mediated and flexible workplaces that are increasingly becoming more complex. Organizations are grappling with difficulties in recruiting, training, and retaining new graduates, and individuals are grappling with ambiguous roles, online skills demands as well as decreased socialization (Hughes and Davis, 2024; Pandey and Dash, 2026). It is thus important to understand the drivers of career shock to come up with effective HR practices in supporting sustainable career development.

The main aim of this paper is to create an elaborate conceptual framework, which elucidates how career shock can occur with fresh graduates in hybrid work setting. The study will combine the concept of human resource management and organizational psychology to determine some of the critical factors that can affect individuals in their early career experiences and to elaborate how these factors contribute to career shock. In line with this, the objectives of the study are: (i) to study the concept and the dimensions of career shock as it applies to early career changes, (ii) to study the effect of hybrid work environments to fresh graduates, (iii) to determine important variables, which reveal the relationship between these variables, and (iv) to present the conceptual model and propositions to explain the relationship between these variables.

The paper is organized in the following way. The following part gives the literature review in detail which will be divided into thematic groups to find the main gaps. This is then accompanied with the research methodology which describes the conceptual approach that was taken in the study. The conceptual background section describes the main constructs and theoretical frameworks that are the foundations of the framework. Next, the model development section introduces the offered conceptual framework and shows the interconnections between variables. The paper proceeds to list the propositions based on the model, and then discusses theoretical and practical implications. Lastly, the paper also summarizes the main findings, limitations, and research directions.

Review of Literature

Literature analysis

Transition of Fresh Graduates to the Labour Market

The shift between higher education to the labour market has been generally identified as a very important period that is characterized by uncertainty, problems of adjustment and changing expectations. Research shows that new graduates find it difficult to match the academic knowledge to the realities of the workplace, especially in volatile and dynamic ones. As noted by Aragonez et al. (2021), the conventional transition patterns have changed in the context of hybrid environments with the help of internships and early work experience, making adaptation more complicated. In the same manner, Link (2023) underlines that graduates joining the workforce throughout and following the COVID-19 pandemic have a lower career readiness and an increased role ambiguity. Abdelbadie (2023), in addition, adds that the issue of learning disruption in higher education has affected self-efficacy of students, which directly affects their integration into their professional life. These results imply that the initial period of career is becoming more and more uncertain, hence generating an environment that supports career shock.

Career Shock and Environmental Uncertainty

Career shock is a term used to describe the disruptive and usually unexpected experiences that can drastically affect the career path of a person. Environmental uncertainty is a key factor that enhances such shocks, particularly among the early-career employees. Greičiūtė (2023) also claims that unpredictable economic and organizational settings make the process of career planning and decision making complicated. Expanding on this view, Izogo et al. (2025) show how career shocks may redefine career intentions, such as moving towards entrepreneurship, with both negative and adaptive reactions. The collaboration of uncertainty and career development implies that recent graduates are especially susceptible because of their little experience and the ability to cope. Career shock, therefore, is a multidimensional phenomenon that is affected by individual and situational aspects.

Changing Nature of Work and Hybrid Work Environments

The emergence of hybrid work structures has radically changed the organizational forms and employee experience. The hybrid work is defined by the flexibility and complexity of working remotely and in-office, at the same time. According to Grzegorzczuk et al. (2021), hybrid work is both a junction of physical and virtual workspaces and necessitates the development of new coordination and communication patterns. Purvanova and Mitchell (2025) also point out that hybrid workplaces require the alignment between the employees and the organizational expectation, which may be difficult to new entrants. According to Al-Habaibeh et al. (2021) and Nordin et al. (2016), the benefits associated with remote work include the

advantage of flexibility, whereas the challenges are reported as isolation, barriers in communication, and decreased supervision. These structural transformations have a massive influence on the perception and adjustment of fresh graduates to the working environment, which may cause career shock.

Obstacles of Fresh Graduates in Hybrid and Remote Work

New graduates who work in hybrid work environments are faced with distinct challenges that are not similar to the traditional workplaces. According to Hughes and Davis (2024), digital upskilling and employability skills are vital in maneuvering through the hybrid work setting, which most graduates do not possess. According to Wong and Beh (2025), they have indicated that gaps in the employability such as communication skills, adaptability, and digital proficiency inhibit workplace integration. Anoop (2025) notes that hybrid work has impacted acculturation in organizations among new starters and that they are unable to internalize organizational culture. Moreover, according to Park et al. (2025), new hires are especially difficult to engage in remote settings because of the lack of socializing and informal learning. These difficulties add up to a sense of perplexity, anxiety and incongruency which enhances the chances of career shock in the newly graduated.

Virtual Work, Onboarding, and Adjustment of Employees

Onboarding and premature socialization are important to staff adaptation, but hybrid work settings make the latter challenging. Esha et al. (2023) discover that virtual onboarding may negatively impact the efficacy of knowledge transfer and relationship building, especially in the case of new employees. According to Ganguly et al. (2025), the employer-employee relationship is changing in virtual workplaces, where the discrepancy between communication and expectations leads to friction. Moreover, Pal (2025) mentions inadequate support systems and unclear roles, as well as the absence of guidance, as the main problems of new employees in the workplace. All these make the transition difficult and predispose more than ever to adverse career experiences, leading to career shock.

Career preparedness, Employability, and Skill shortages

Employability skills and career readiness are important factors that determine effective workforce entry. Pandey and Dash (2026) highlight the importance of having structured training systems to develop competencies among IT freshers, especially in the digital age. According to CH and Pai (2024), strategic career planning and skill development are key to improving employability and career success. Nevertheless, Wong et al. (2024) show that the choice of a career among fresh graduates depends on a variety of factors, with the perceived opportunities and external uncertainties being among them. Thambar and Hughes (2023) also state that graduates are also forced to constantly adapt to disruptions brought about by technological changes and automation. The incongruity between the necessary skills and real competencies also tends to raise the adjustment challenges which further aggravates career shock.

Hybrid Work and Engagement, Exhaustion, and Psychological Outcomes

Workplace hybrids are known to have a considerable impact on employee engagement, and well-being, especially among young employees. Oxendahl (2024) presents the perspective of the career stage to demonstrate that remote and hybrid work may cause both engagement and exhaustion, and this is contingent on both individual and contextual aspects. The blurring of work and personal life, together with the growing use of digital communication, is a source of stress and burnout. Borzikowsky et al. (2023) emphasize that the perceived autonomy and the work-life balance determine the preference towards remote work among the employees, but these advantages might not be completely achieved by fresh graduates because they need to have guidance and socialization. This means that hybrid work can produce mixed experiences, both beneficial and problematic, and which can be in the form of career shock.

HRM Issues in Recruiting and managing Fresh Graduates

As an HR, recruiting fresh graduates in the contemporary work environments is challenging. Gethe and Bhatia (2019) outline problems with recruiting freshers, such as skill misalignment and unrealistic expectations. These issues have become even more problematic with the transition to the hybrid work environment, as HR professionals have to redesign the recruitment, onboarding, and training procedures. The changing face of work requires a broader viewpoint in dealing with early-career workers, paying attention to adaptability, learning on the job, and psychological support. This may result in discontent, lack of interest, and eventual career shock in fresh graduates due to failure to tackle these challenges.

Research Gap Overview

Existing literature has captured in detail hybrid work, employability, and career transitions but there is a scarcity of combining the three to elucidate career shock in fresh graduates within the hybrid work setup.

The majority of the literature considers these variables independently without a detailed conceptual framework that describes the relationship between these variables. This gap indicates that there is a need to have a structured model, which elaborates how the hybrid work conditions, individual competencies and organizational factors interact to create career shock.

Research Methods

This research uses a conceptual research design (20212026) to establish a theory that would explain career shock in fresh graduates in a hybrid work environment. Its analysis is made on the basis of an average of about 20 scholarly sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, books, and doctoral dissertations that were published in 2016-2026. Important references are the works of Greičiūtė (2023), Hughes and Davis (2024), and Izogo et al. (2025). Systematic literature review and narrative synthesis process is used in order to determine constructs and relationships. Keywords such as career shock, hybrid working, new graduates, role ambiguity, digital skills, adaptation at the workplace, and psychological strain have been identified as major keywords to be used. The research combines theoretical views in order to come up with a conceptual model without empirical validation.

Conceptual Background

Career shock is a concept that has multiple dimensions and definitions

Career shock is described as disruptive and in most cases unpredictable events or experiences that have a profound effect on the career path, perceptions and decision making of an individual. It is especially eminent in early stages of career when people are not already exposed to realities of the workplace and exist in their own coping styles. Career shocks can be caused by uncertainty in the environment, changes in an organization, or the discrepancies between the expectations and the real working experiences (Greičiūtė, 2023; Izogo et al., 2025). Such upheavals are aggravated in the case of fresh graduates by the lack of professional experience and career trajectories (Link, 2023).

The concept of career shock can be interpreted as a multidimensional phenomenon, which is comprised of the following dimensions:

Cognitive Dimension - Brings up the differences between expectations and job roles, such as role ambiguity and job description ambiguity (Pal, 2025).

Emotional Dimension -Includes mental reactions like anxiety, stress, uncertainty, and lack of self-confidence, which are usually caused by unstable working situations (Oxendahl, 2024).

Behavioral Dimension - Records noticeable responses like dissociation, ineffectiveness, or desire to leave the organization (Izogo et al., 2025).

Social Dimension - Associates with difficulties in workplace integration, such as poor interaction, poor social bonding, and a sense of belonging (Park et al., 2025).

The combination of these dimensions describes the disruption of fresh graduates during the beginning phases of their career and how they react upon it.

Hybrid Work Environments Explanation

Hybrid work environments are a type of work setup where there is a mixture of remote (through virtual work) and on-site (physical office) working. This model has become one of the dominant models of modern organizations especially in knowledge-based industries. The concept of hybrid work became prominent after the COVID-19 pandemic, which radically changed the organization and implementation of work (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021; Purvanova and Mitchell, 2025).

Hybrid work is marked by:

Work place and time flexibility.

Relying on online communication and teamwork tools.

Less physical contact and monitoring.

Although hybrid work has a number of benefits, including flexibility and autonomy, it also poses serious challenges. The research shows that remote and hybrid workplaces may cause communication challenges, social isolation, and lack of access to informal learning (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021; Nordin et al., 2016). They are even more intensified in the case of new graduates who require formatted instructions and

orientation at the workplace (Anoopa, 2025).

Moreover, onboarding procedures are virtual and require less face-to-face interaction, which can complicate the successful assimilation into the organization and may not allow new employees to comprehend job roles, expectations, and organizational culture (Esha et al., 2023). The factors lead to feelings of uncertainty and difficulties in adjusting hence, making one prone to career shock.

Theoretical Foundation

The current research relates to the existing theories in human resource management and organizational psychology to define how career shock can arise among fresh graduates in hybrid workplaces. This shift between education and employment, especially in digitally mediated and flexible work patterns, is a place where job demands, personal abilities and organizational support systems interact in a very intricate way. Theoretical approaches that may help to comprehend the impact of workplace conditions on employee adaptation and well-being include the Job Demands Resources model, Organizational Socialization Theory, and Person-Environment Fit Theory (Oxendahl, 2024; Esha et al., 2023; Wong and Beh, 2025). Moreover, other theories, including the Conservation of Resources and Self-Efficacy, can also provide an understanding of how people react to stress and non-predictability in changing work situations (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021; Abdelbadie, 2023). Combined, these frameworks permit a holistic perception of how hybrid work settings can influence the initial career experiences.

Table 1 – Theories associated with the study

Theory	Core Idea	Relevance to the Study
Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model	Employee outcomes are shaped by the balance between job demands and available resources	Explains how hybrid work demands such as role ambiguity, isolation, and digital overload contribute to stress and potential career shock (Oxendahl, 2024)
Organizational Socialization Theory	Employees adapt by learning roles, norms, and workplace culture	Highlights difficulties faced by fresh graduates in hybrid settings due to reduced interaction and onboarding challenges (Esha et al., 2023; Anoopa, 2025)
Person–Environment Fit Theory	Alignment between individual capabilities and work environment determines adjustment	Explains mismatch between fresh graduates' expectations and hybrid work realities leading to career shock (Wong & Beh, 2025)
Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory	Stress occurs when individuals lose or lack essential resources	Helps explain psychological strain when fresh graduates lack support, guidance, and digital competencies (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021)
Career Construction Theory	Individuals actively shape their careers through adaptation to changing environments	Supports understanding of how career shock influences early career development and career decision-making (Greičiūtė, 2023)
Self-Efficacy Theory	Individual belief in one's ability affects behavior and adaptation	Explains how low confidence due to skill gaps and lack of preparedness can intensify career shock among fresh graduates (Abdelbadie, 2023)

Overall, the combination of several theoretical viewpoints allows a solid ground to study career shock in fresh graduates in mixed work arrangements. All these theories emphasize on the importance of harmonizing job requirements with sufficient resources, proper socialization and aligning personal abilities with the organizational requirements. They also underscore the influence of psychological resources like self-efficacy and resilience to reduce stress and increase adaptation. With the help of the synthesis of these theoretical sources, the study has created a consistent framework that demonstrates the interaction of organizational, environmental, and individual factors to influence career outcomes (Greičiūtė, 2023; Oxendahl, 2024). This theoretical justification does not only justify the conceptual model being proposed, but

also has a theoretical basis in order to validate and apply the HR intervention in the future.

Model Development

Identification of important variables

The proposed model is based on the conceptual background and the previous literature, and it outlines variables that determine the impact of the conditions of hybrid working on the experience of career shock among fresh graduates.

Independent Variables (Antecedents)

Hybrid Work Characteristics - Comprised of flexibility, digital reliance, less oversight, and less face-to-face communication, which influence initial working experiences (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021; Purvanova and Mitchell, 2025).

Role Ambiguity- Means ambiguous job expectations, duties, and performance standards, which are more likely to occur in hybrid environments (Pal, 2025).

Digital Skill Gap- Indicates the gap between the demand and supply of technological skills among fresh graduates (Hughes and Davis, 2024; Pandey and Dash, 2026).

Mediating Variables

Workplace Adjustment - The extent to which new graduates can adjust to the organizational culture, work procedures and demands (Anoop, 2025).

Psychological Strain- It contains stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion due to the uncertainty and work demands (Oxendahl, 2024).

Dependent Variable

Career Shock - An outcome that is multidimensional, which addresses cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social disturbance of an early career experience (Izogo et al., 2025).

Moderating Variables

Organizational Support - Incorporates onboarding, mentoring, and training strategies that contribute to lessening uncertainty and enhancing adjustment (Esha et al., 2023; Park et al., 2025).

Personal Factors (Self-Efficacy / Resilience) - Individual abilities that determine how people can handle adversities and fit into hybrid offices (Abdelbadie, 2023).

Logical Relationships between the variables

The model is that hybrid work attributes, role ambiguity, and digital skill gaps are the main stressors of fresh graduates in the workforce. These reasons make uncertainty and lack of clarity common and people find it hard to adapt to their positions.

Hybrid workplaces restrict face-to-face interaction and informal learning, both of which adversely impact workplace adaptation (Anoop, 2025).

Role ambiguity also contributes to confusion and decreases confidence, which causes psychological strain (Pal, 2025).

The lack of digital skills brings about performance issues, which add stress and diminish flexibility (Hughes and Davis, 2024).

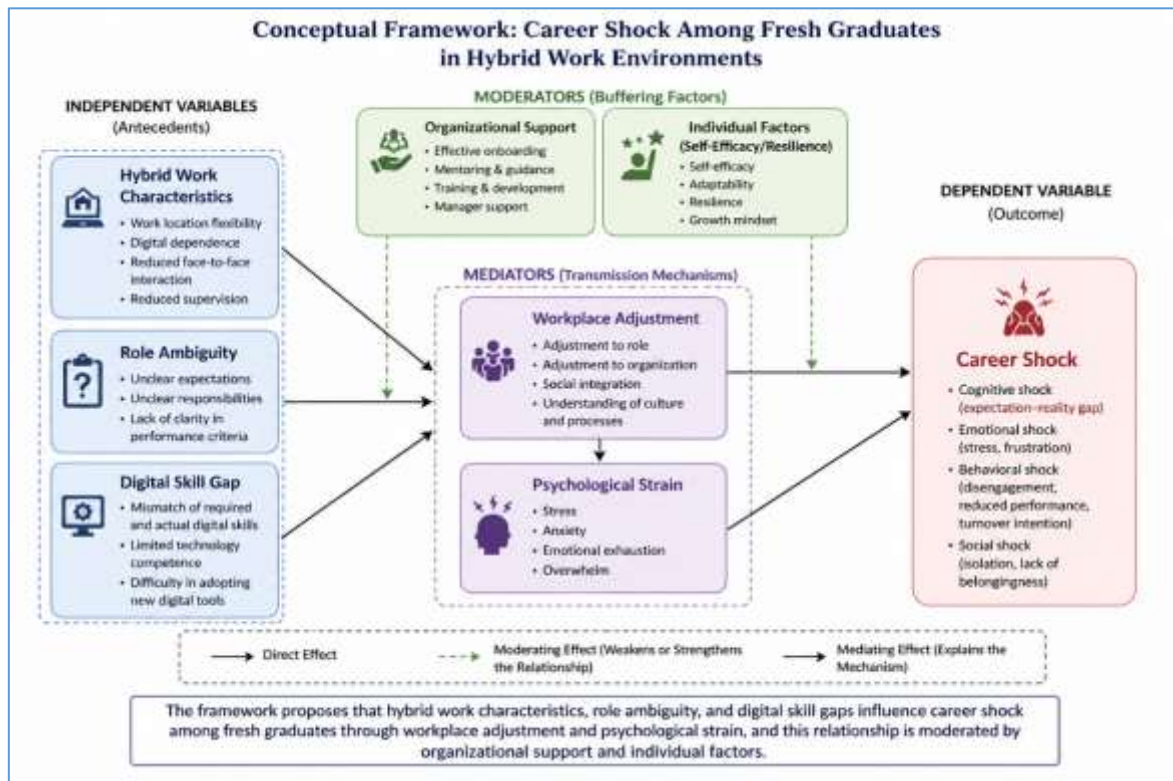
These difficulties are mediated by workplace adaptation and psychological stress, which translate these difficulties into career shock. The lack of adapting and excessive psychological stress levels enhance the chances of cognitive dissonance, emotional distress, and disengagement, which eventually result in career shock (Oxendahl, 2024; Izogo et al., 2025).

Individual resilience and organizational support are some of the moderating variables that determine the strength of these relationships. The presence of strong support systems and increased self-efficacy can help to alleviate stress, improve adjustment, and mitigate the adverse impact of hybrid work problems.

Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual model is as shown below:

Figure 1 – Proposed conceptual framework for the study



The suggested model describes the impact of hybrid working conditions on fresh graduates in terms of experiencing career shock:

Initial Conditions (Antecedents)

New graduates come to hybrid workplaces, which are flexible, less supervised, and highly digital dependent. Together with the role ambiguity and skill gaps, these elements bring about uncertainty and challenges.

Adjustment Process (Mediators)

These difficulties affect the effectiveness of the adjustment of the individuals to the work place and the degree of the psychological pressure experienced by them. The development of career shock is a result of poor adjustment and increased stress which are the important mechanisms.

Outcome (Career Shock)

With low adjustment and high psychological strains, there is cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social career shock.

Buffering Effects (Moderators)

Organizational support and personal ability are important in decreasing the severity of career shock. The negative effect of stressors can be undermined by effective onboarding, mentoring, and increased self-efficacy.

The model combines organizational, individual, and environmental variables to describe the occurrence of career shock in fresh graduates working in hybrid workplaces. It offers a broad outline of the challenges of early career and gives a basis upon which early career challenges can be empirically validated by determining the mediating and moderating mechanisms.

Propositions

According to the offered conceptual framework, the propositions below are created to describe the associations between the conditions of hybrid work, individual and organizational factors, and the

experience of career shock in fresh graduates. The propositions have a foundation in the available literature and are backed by pertinent theoretical orientations.

P1: Hybrid Work Characteristics and Career shock.

The nature of a hybrid work is likely to be strongly positively correlated with career shock among new graduates. The loose but discontinuous character of hybrid working minimizes the possibilities of direct supervision, informal learning and real-time feedback, all of which are essential in early career development. Inadequate face-to-face communication and extreme use of digital communication can cause confusion and disorientation in the perception of work duties and organizational requirements (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021; Purvanova and Mitchell, 2025). In the case of fresh graduates, who rely on systematic guidance to a great degree, these conditions compound confusion and difficulty in adjustment, thus enhancing career shock.

P2: Career Shock and Role ambiguity.

The career shock of fresh graduates is positively related to role ambiguity. Lack of clarity on the role of employees, their functions and expectations on performance results in cognitive dissonance and lack of confidence. This is especially an issue in hybrid environments where communication gaps are more likely (Pal, 2025). Lack of clear direction leads to uncertainty and stress, which can occur in terms of emotional and behavioral disturbances, all of which add to career shock.

P3: Career Shock and Digital Skill Gap.

Digital skill gaps will have a positive effect on career shock. New graduates with insufficient technological skills might not be able to work successfully in digitally-absorbing hybrid workplaces. Such a discrepancy between the necessary and actual skills may cause frustration, diminished self-efficacy, and performance anxiety (Hughes and Davis, 2024; Pandey and Dash, 2026). As a result, those who undergo these gaps will tend to face hindrance in their career development and adaptation leading to career shock.

P4: Mediating Role of Workplace Adjustment.

The mediating variable is workplace adjustment to mediate the relationship between the challenges of hybrid work (hybrid work characteristics, role ambiguity, and digital skill gap) and career shock. Adjustment is effective when there is knowledge of the organizational culture, integration and adjusting to the processes of work. Nevertheless, the hybrid work setting reduces the possibility of socialization and experiential learning, and the adaptation is more challenging (Anoop, 2025; Esha et al., 2023). This lack of adjustment chances the chances of mismatch and dissatisfaction, and eventually results in career shock.

P5: Modulating Effect of Psychological Strain.

The mediator in the relationship between challenges of hybrid work and career shock is supposed to be psychological strain. Stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion may occur due to exposure to uncertainty, ambiguous roles and performance demands. These conditions are further worsened by hybrid work environments, which are isolated and lack clear boundaries of work (Oxendahl, 2024; Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021). The heightened psychological demand has adverse effects on well-being and coping ability thus exacerbating the career shock experience.

P6: Moderating Role of Organizational Support.

The moderating factor between career shock and hybrid work issues is suggested to be organizational support. Uncertainty can be decreased with the help of effective onboarding, mentoring, training, and managerial support that will help employees adjust better. Structured support systems in hybrid environments especially play a crucial role in supporting integration and learning in fresh graduates (Esha et al., 2023; Park et al., 2025). The positive relationship between organizational challenges and career shock is likely to be undermined by higher levels of organizational support.

P7: Moderating Role of Personal Factors (Self-Efficacy / Resilience)

Self-efficacy and resilience are individual factors that are likely to mediate the relationship between hybrid work challenges and career shock. Graduates who have a greater self-efficacy are more assured of their capacity to accomplish tasks and fit into a new setting, with resilience making them effectively handle stress and uncertainty (Abdelbadie, 2023). Such personal resources lessen the adverse effect of work-related issues, thus alleviating the severity of the career shock.

P8: Relationship between Workplace Adjustment and Psychological Strain.

Psychological strain is supposed to have an adverse correlation with workplace adjustment. New graduates with effective adaptation to the work environment are bound to have reduced stress and anxiety.

On the other hand, the inability to adjust adds to the feelings of uncertainty and exhaustion (Anoop, 2025; Oxendahl, 2024). This correlation underscores the interrelatedness of well-being and adaptation to the development of career outcomes.

The propositions put forward interrelate to how career shock in new graduates can be explained by challenges related to hybrids of work in both first and second ways. The mediating variables, including workplace adjustment and psychological strain, give an understanding of the mechanism underlying whereas the moderating variables indicate conditions that the relationships can be strengthened or weakened. This set of propositions gives a complete theoretical framework on how the phenomena of career shock can be understood and testable in hybrid work environments.

Implications of the study

The conceptual framework that has been proposed has significant implications both to theory and practice in the area of human resource management, especially in the hybrid work environments and early career transitions.

Theoretical Implications

This research will add to the current literature on HRM and organizational behavior through unveiling a comprehensive framework that elucidates the concept of career shock among fresh graduates in a hybrid working environment. Although the dimensions have been discussed in previous research on career transitions, employability, and hybrid work, the current model combines these factors to offer a better overall perspective on early career disruptions (Greičiūtė, 2023; Izogo et al., 2025).

First, the research expands the use of the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model by situating the features of the hybrid work, role ambiguity, and digital skill gaps as important aspects of job demands affecting the initial career outcomes (Oxendahl, 2024). Second, it contributes to the enrichment of the Organizational Socialization Theory by outlining the impact of a lack of physical interaction and the virtual processes of onboarding on the adjustment of hybrid environments (Esha et al., 2023; Anoop, 2025). Third, the study applies mediating and moderating variables, which promote Person-Environment Fit Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory, showing how the incongruence between the expectations and demands of the environment and their related resources induce strains and career shock in a person (Wong and Beh, 2025; Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021).

Further, the conceptualization of career shock in the study develops it as a multidimensional construct comprising of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social dimensions thus providing a more sophisticated theoretical perspective. The use of personal variables like self-efficacy also reinforces the theoretical framework by incorporating the micro-level psychological view to the macro-level dynamics of an organization (Abdelbadie, 2023). On the whole, the research offers a starting point of empirical investigations and theory building in the new field of work hybrid and initial career experience.

Practical Implications

The implications of the findings of this conceptual framework are substantial to HR practitioners, organizations, and educational settings that are interested in helping fresh graduates deal with hybrid work settings.

In terms of the organization, the research notes that the onboarding and socialization processes have to be redesigned to accommodate the hybrid work model. Conventional methods of onboarding might not be effective in the virtual environment; thus, companies are advised to adopt organized onboarding processes, mentoring programmes, and ongoing feedback tools to ensure a seamless adaptation (Esha et al., 2023; Park et al., 2025).

Second, the research highlights the need to minimise role ambiguity through the specification of job roles, job duties, and performance expectation. Frequent interaction and consistent mentoring would help a lot to minimize uncertainty and minimize early career derailment (Pal, 2025).

Third, companies need to invest in online skill courses and training to narrow the competency gaps in fresh graduates. Since hybrid work requires the use of digital technologies, staff training to have the required technical skills may contribute to increased confidence and performance (Hughes and Davis, 2024; Pandey and Dash, 2026).

Fourth, the research highlights the importance of organizational support systems such as managerial support, opportunities to interact with peers, and initiatives to support the well being of employees. A supportive workplace would help alleviate psychological stress and improve employee engagement (Purvanova and Mitchell, 2025).

Lastly, the research recommends that HR professionals should work on the cultivation of personal skills like self-efficacy and resilience by training, coaching, and counseling them. In addition to hybrid working conditions, fresh graduates can be better able to overcome uncertainty by strengthening these personal resources, which will help them cope with it (Abdelbadie, 2023).

In general, the research offers practical implications to researchers and practitioners by connecting the theoretical concepts with practical HR issues. By mitigating the causes of career shock, organizations will be able to enable more effective employee acclimatization, increase retention, and contribute to a more long-term early career growth in a hybrid work setting.

Conclusion and Future research

This paper formulates a conceptual framework to explain career shock in fresh graduates in hybrid workplaces through the lenses of organizational, individual and contextual variables. The model identifies hybrid work nature, role ambiguity, and lack of digital skills as priority stressors, which affect career shock by affecting workplace adaptation and psychological stress. It also lays stress on buffering effects of organizational support and personal potentials like self-efficacy and resilience. Conceptualizing career shock as a multidimensional construct, the study provides an insight into the better comprehension of early career disruption in the modern work environment.

The study is conceptual in nature and has not been empirically validated even though it has its contribution. Thus, further studies ought to be conducted on experimenting the proposed model with any kind of quantitative or mixed-method research within a variety of domains and geographical settings. It is possible that longitudinal studies may shed light on the evolution of career shock over time and the transition to stable career periods like entry-level to middle-level, and middle-level to senior career stages. Moreover, other possible variables, including organizational culture, leadership styles, and technological adaptability, can be discussed in future studies. It could also be improved by comparing the research that has been done between remote, hybrid, and traditional work models. On the whole, this research provides a grounding to the future empirical investigation and gives a sense of the direction towards conducting the research on the topic of the early career experience in the changing world of work...

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