HYBRID ROLES: THE ART OF WEARING MULTIPLE HATS

INTRODUCTION

In today's complex and ever-changing world, businesses face a myriad of challenges that demand innovative solutions and agile approaches. The trifecta of economic uncertainties, rapid technological advancements, and budget cuts poses formidable obstacles to organisations across the tech world. In the face of such challenges, the concept of hybrid roles takes centre stage. Hybrid roles can be defined as when an individual has the capability of wearing multiple hats and delivering, utilising those different set of skills. This white paper delves into the numerous advantages and the need for hybrid roles in the current organisational landscapes, be it in government or commercial organisations. This transformative mindset and a hybrid team dynamic promises to navigate the complexities of our time and drive businesses towards sustainable growth and prosperity, ensuring cost optimisation for companies.

In the current world, looking at medium to large organisations the typical structure is around non-hybrid job families, focusing on specific skill sets with a siloed approach to work. This approach often fails to recognise a hybrid mindset that can consciously combine multiple skills from various job families, allowing individuals to be capable of performing multiple roles effectively. This highlights the need to reconsider traditional organisational structures to better accommodate the evolving nature of work. By combining diverse skill sets, the 1:1 relationship between a role and a person is removed, allowing individuals to efficiently perform and switch between multiple roles to address multifaceted challenges.

The concept of hybrid roles finds more traction in the private sector than in the public, coinciding with a notable rise in the public sector's attrition rates. According to an article posted in Civil Service World, figures show that number of leavers in civil service increased significantly by 60% in 2021-2022 in comparison to the previous year[1]. This divergence reflects the private sector's agility in embracing adaptable job structures, potentially impacting the public sector's ability to retain talent and respond to ever-evolving workplace needs. Additionally, this concept is cost transformative, as with hybrid roles challenges like indirection in planning, and wastage of resources can be overcome, essentially more can be achieved with spending less.

FORMING HYBRID ROLES

The core foundation of effective modern technology implementation can be traced back to the Agile manifesto, which revolutionised project management and collaboration principles, and the contemporary product-centric team structure characterised by role decentralisation and multidisciplinary individuals who are able to fulfil multiple roles. The modern product-centric approach promotes a federation of roles within teams i.e., hybrid roles, fostering greater flexibility and adaptability, which are crucial elements in today's dynamic technological landscape.

The exercise and approach of forming hybrid roles within the team is drawn from existing roles, skills and knowledge in an organisation. For this exercise, Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) manual can be utilised along with the Digital Delivery and Technology (DDAT) framework to understand the different roles and responsibilities and how they can be used to structure the different competencies in a team. As an example, with respect to Business Design, Figure 1 exemplifies some of the industry recognised roles in this area and how they overlap. The figure highlights the common tasks and responsibilities that exist between different roles and provides a premise for why the hybrid roles should exist.

Hybrid roles enable the pooling of skills, knowledge and responsibilities from siloed traditional job-family-based roles, fostering an empowered team that excels in both shared expertise and

understanding. As they progressively broaden the scope and depth of their responsibilities, individuals in these roles evolve into versatilists[2], a term coined by Gartner.
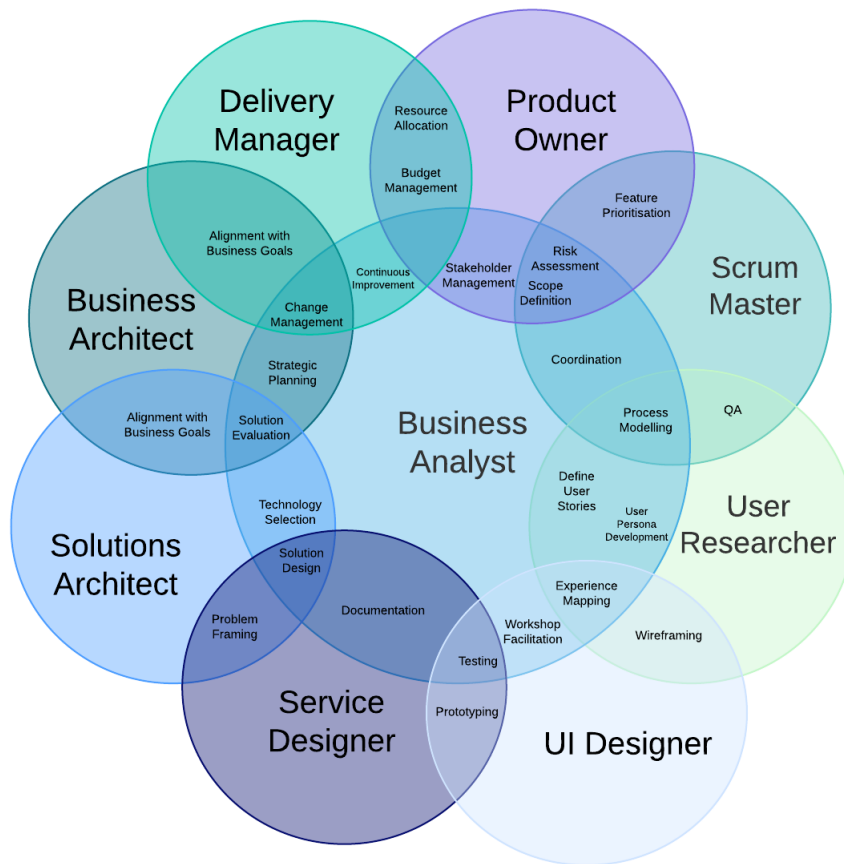

Figure 1

Fig 1.0 Example of industry-recognised roles that demonstrate overlap and scope, driving increased investment in roles and output, ultimately enhancing quality

With Millennials now dominating the workforce, a key consideration for team members and delivery managers alike is the drivers that keep both millennials and Gen Z in the workforce. According to a study by Deloitte[3], Gen Z and Millennials are both open to challenges but need an opportunity and a platform. With cost optimisation becoming a priority when putting together teams, there is much to gain from allowing team members to adopt the opportunity for more without hiring additional specialists. When comparing the two generations, Millennials emphasise teamwork and collaboration, enabling them to adapt effectively to hybrid roles. In contrast, Gen Z places a higher value on enhancing individual skills, which also contributes to their ability to adapt to hybrid roles. To embed such hybrid roles in teams, organisations must first understand the expected service outcome and the current composition of the team, that is, the skills, roles and responsibilities.

Viewing team members as customers and providing clarity on existing business offerings and their value fosters a sense of ownership and contribution. This approach allows team members to appreciate their role and contribution to the business.

The team development view involves uncovering existing skills through a skills assessment exercise. Widely adopted skills framework e.g., SFIA framework[4] and DigComp[5], alongside other market standards and accreditations, can serve as benchmarks to identify skill gaps, which can then be addressed through a learning path that promotes growth within each team member's career, enabling them to step into roles outside a single specialisation. Then by using role mapping, potential hybrid

roles can be mapped out that could benefit and clearly define the scope, responsibilities, and expected outcomes for each hybrid role.

Whilst the orientation for attrition can tend to be more pay focused, employing a hybrid roles structure allows for a new approach to increasing retention by providing individuals the opportunity to scale within their role and constantly be acquiring and developing new skills with the support of learning paths. This process may also involve recruitment to fill skill gaps within a team.

THE CHALLENGES

As with any change or adaptation, there are challenges that need to be addressed and considered when adopting a hybrid role structure within a team. These include:

- Career Progression – Hybrid roles might not fit neatly into traditional career paths, which could create uncertainty for employees seeking advancement. Teams need to develop clear paths for career progression which may well involve a combination of lateral moves and skill development. Some may see hybrid roles as a great way to broaden their skill set and learn different ways of working, however others may be more interested in a direct and clear career path (e.g., Business Analyst to Senior Business Analyst) and may see hybrid roles a barrier. Employees could feel either lost or overwhelmed by the additional dimensions of complexity hybrid roles introduce. Without a clear line-of-sight to a neat career path it can be demotivating if not well managed and communicated.
- Scope & Freedom – Hybrid roles may also cause challenges when it comes to the scope of them. Naturally, individuals may tend to gravitate towards what they find most comfortable and what they are good at rather than the skills that are needed. For example, a team member who has a lot more experience as a Business Analyst may lean more towards that side of the hybrid role and ignore the user experience elements of the work that need addressing. This is commonplace when you allow people the freedom that comes with a hybrid role operating model. To overcome this challenge, it is vital that there is a push and plenty of opportunity for team members to spend time on self-development and learning new skills through various learning courses and being pushed out of their comfort zone whilst on the job.
- Gravitational pull – Individuals may naturally gravitate towards work that they are more experienced in doing or is easier to do with their existing skillset. The adoption of hybrid roles requires a growth mindset and employees who are willing to challenge themselves.
- Recruitment challenges - Recruitment for hybrid roles within a team can pose challenges due to the specialised skills required and the evolving nature of these roles:
  - Role clarity - Communicating the responsibilities and expectations of hybrid roles effectively in job descriptions can be complex. Ambiguity might deter potential candidates or attract those who might not be a good fit. There is also the challenge that sometimes a team member will just have to do one role in comparison to the others in the team who are tasked with picking up more than one role. It is vital that this is clearly communicating at the beginning of a project. Conversely, the importance of highlighting the opportunities that a hybrid role enables in the recruitment process cannot be underestimated.
  - Finding the right skill set - Finding people with the right mix of skills, such as design thinking, business strategy, analysis and possible technical abilities can be challenging. Organisations will need to accept that it is unlikely they will identify a candidate who meets all the criteria, and they will need to ensure the right training and development is made available for them. Therefore, the recruitment process is seeking the growth mindset and aptitude to broaden competencies much more than a specific skillset.

THE BENEFITS

Despite these challenges, there are also numerous benefits with having Hybrid roles within a team. With the marketplace becoming more transient with its workforce, more agile with its delivery and more cost-conscious with its funding, the opportunity to utilise and develop hybrid roles has never been greater. Benefits of Hybrid Roles within a team include:

- Efficient Resource Allocation - When it comes to a cost-conscious marketplace, the benefit of hybrid roles is how it allows for efficient resource allocation. Having individuals with hybrid roles helps to cover multiple responsibilities without the need to hire additional personnel who specialise in one service. Not only does this ensure tasks are covered without overburdening team members by causing them to excessively hold a particular position but rather having the flexibility to move across the team, which also ensures cost effectiveness.
- Problem Solving and Agile ways of working - Another huge benefit of hybrid roles within teams is that it comes with more enhanced creativity and the ability to solve problems significantly and more efficiently. This is because it encourages agile way of working, allowing insights from various domains which enables unique and adaptable solutions to be identified which aren't always visible when confined to a single field.
- Transformational Change - Having hybrid roles in a team can elevate the capability to guide organisations through transformational change. For example, through performing multiple services such as innovation workshops, providing insights into emerging technologies and aligning stakeholders around a shared vision, the hybrid team can combine the findings from these services and make effective decisions and recommendations that allow organisations to push forward in continuous improvement and growth, embrace new processes, systems and business models.
- Being able to have employees who are more able and empowered to do whatever is required for the organisational outcomes rather than be being constrained by their notional organisational position.
- Enabling a less hierarchical organisational construct, supporting a more pluralistic approach and more modern organisational designs.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Applying the concept of hybrid roles at Glue Reply and for a diverse set of clients has allowed to realise the benefits and some key tips on how to successfully put it into practice. Following are a few tips:

- Clearly Define Roles and Responsibilities: Ensuring employees understand the expectation from them in each functional area.
- Training and Development: Provide comprehensive training and development opportunities to employees.
- Flexibility and Adaptability: Encourage flexible work environment, allowing employees to be comfortable with and capable of handling evolving job requirements.
- Technology and Tools: Invest to facilitate execution across different functional areas, ensuring employees have access to the necessary resources.
- Feedback Mechanisms: Establish mechanisms allowing employees to voice their concerns, share insights and suggest improvements for betterment.
- Following on from the above tips, below are some of the key takeaways as hybrid roles were put into place:
- Enhancement of efficiency by reducing the need of specialised resources.
- Agile product centres and design enablement hubs further amplify this adaptability by fostering collaborative skills exchange.

- Gaining stakeholder buy-in through transparent communication, establishing role clarity, and recognizing cross-disciplinary contributions incentivises engagement.
- Consider carefully the broader organisational changes that having a more hybrid workforce facilitates, and equally ensure that the organisational design doesn't have unnecessary impedance through contradictory doctrine, embedded misconceptions etc.
- There needs to be proportionate change strategy, communication and embedding effort in order to underpin the change in approach.
- Lastly, nurturing collaboration, aligning goals, and promoting transparency mitigate knowledge hoarding tendencies, enabling organizations to effectively harness hybrid roles for lasting success.

CONCLUSION

The approach of hybrid roles facilitates empowered teams with diversified expertise, fostering both shared knowledge and specialised depth. As businesses strive for sustainable growth, hybrid roles offer efficient resource utilisation, enhanced problem-solving, and the potential for transformative change. While challenges such as training complexity and career progression exist, the benefits of agility, cost-effectiveness, and innovative thinking make hybrid roles a compelling strategy for thriving in a dynamic environment. Provided what is known now, the concept of hybrid roles emerges as a pivotal solution.