

Reimagining Leadership in Hybrid Work Systems: An Integrative Conceptual Model of Strategies and Employee Outcomes

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Abstract

The sudden transition to the hybrid work models has changed the structure, expectations, and leadership style of organizations especially in the areas of knowledge-intensive, like in the Information Technology sector. Combining both remote and in-office work arrangements in hybrid work, in addition to flexibility and productivity advantages, entails bringing about challenges of significant magnitude on the front of communication, coordination, trust, and employee well-being. Here, leadership has become a key element in dealing with the complexities of hybrid teams. The current research will focus on forming a comprehensive conceptual framework that will incorporate various leadership strategies and will explore their impact on the key employee outcomes in hybrid work settings. Based on the widely accepted theoretical viewpoints, including Transformational Leadership Theory, Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Job Demands-Resources (JDR) Theory, and Media Richness Theory, the study recognizes five key dimensions of leadership, namely; transformational leadership, trust-based leadership, inclusive leadership, digital leadership competence, and communication strategies, and links them to employee outcomes such as team performance, productivity, job satisfaction, well-being, and work-life balance. The research design is a conceptual research design, which is founded on a systematic review and synthesis of existing literature to propose an integrated model, and develop a set of propositions explaining these relationships. The results indicate that the effectiveness of leadership in hybrid work environments is multidimensional and needs a combination of motivational, relational, technological, and communication-oriented leadership approaches. The work is a contribution to the literature because it fills the gaps in the understanding of hybrid situations in relation to leadership. It can also provide practical insights on how organizations can formulate effective leadership strategies that can positively influence performance and employee well-being in a hybrid work environment.

Keywords: Work-life Balance, Work, Team, Leadership, Employee, Work, Transformational Leadership, Leadership Strategies, Hybrid Work.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The paradigm shift in the nature of work has seen a fundamental change in work arrangements, that is, the traditional office arrangements giving way to more flexible and technology-enabled work arrangements. In the past, the organizations were centralised in nature, which was typified by physical presence, fixed working hours and direct managerial supervision. Yet, the development of digital technologies, growing globalization, and evolving workforce demands have gradually led to the advent of remote and flexible work arrangements (Allen et al., 2021; Messenger and Gschwind, 2016)).

The COVID-19 pandemic serves as a severe inflection point in the process of speeding up this transition. Industrial organizations were forced to quickly shift to remote working models, which proved that work could be efficiently done regardless of the physical location. Although remote work provided continuity to businesses and in some instances, it increased productivity, it also revealed structural issues of continuity to businesses and in some instances, it enhanced productivity (Carillo et al., 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021)).

Hybrid work has become a prevalent and viable work arrangement in the post-pandemic environment. Hybrid work combines remote and in-office work, giving the organizations the flexibility to balance flexibility and collaboration. The existing literature proposes that under the condition of effective management, hybrid models can lead to high employee satisfaction, retention as well as organizational performance (Bloom et al., 2024; Hopkins and Bardoel, 2023) . Consequently, hybrid work is no longer a transitional change but a paradigm shift in the modern organizational design.

The change is especially pronounced in the knowledge-intensive industry like Information Technology (IT) where the work is inherently digital and collaborative. IT organizations heavily depend on virtual communication tools, cloud, and distributed team structures to manage operations (Cortellazzo et al., 2020; Mitchell, 2021)). The National Capital Region (NCR) has become a significant centre of IT and IT-enabled services with a varied workforce, high rates of digital adoptions, and widespread use of hybrid work models, in the Indian context.

1.2 Hybrid Work as a New Organizational Paradigm.

Hybrid work is a strategic development of work design, which integrates the benefits of the traditional and remote work model. Its main features are a lack of time and space constraints, the use of digital technologies, and the organization of teams that are geographically dispersed. This model is able to help organizations retain the collaborative benefits of physical workplaces and provide employees with autonomy and flexibility (Hopkins and Bardoel, 2023; Laurant and Jonasson, 2025) .

On an organizational level, hybrid work has been linked to enhanced productivity, cost-efficiency and employee retention (Bloom et al., 2024; Boutros et al., 2023). Employee-wise, it improves job satisfaction and work-life balance by reducing commuting time and providing increased flexibility in work schedules (Allen et al., 2021; Krajčik et al., 2023) . As much as hybrid work has these benefits, it presents a lot of managerial and organizational challenges.

The main issues are the existence of communication gaps, difficulties in coordination, decreased informal interactions, and the threat of employee disengagement (Hendriks et al., 2024; Ipsen et al., 2021)). Moreover, hybrid work may blur the line between work and personal life, which in turn results in an increase in stress and burnout in the absence of a successful management strategy (Vyas, 2022; De Vincenzi et al., 2022)). All of these complexities suggest that hybrid work is not just a change in structure but a paradigm shift that will demand new strategies in management and leadership.

The topic of leadership in hybrid work environments can be discussed as follows:

The transition to hybrid work has essentially reshaped the role of leadership. The traditional leadership models that were based on close supervision and proximity are becoming less and less effective in the management of the distributed teams. Rather, hybrid environment leadership requires a shift towards more flexible, trust-based, and technology-enabled systems, often conceptualized as e-leadership or digital leadership (Dirani et al., 2020; Parker and Grote, 2020) .

In mixed environments, leaders will have to coordinate teams that work in many places and use web-based communication tools. This would require good communication skills to make sure that there is clarity, alignment and co-ordination. Communication effectiveness in these situations is determined by the proper choice of the communication channels suggested by the media richness theory (Daft and Lengel, 1986)].

As a key aspect of leadership during hybrid teams, trust is identified. When leaders do not have the benefit of constant observation they must use the relationship of trust to make sure that accountability and performance are maintained. The quality of leader-member relationships fosters collaboration, engagement, and cohesion of a team (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) . Moreover, in hybrid workplaces, the nature of performance management is to switch the input-based monitoring to the outcome-based evaluation, where the focus is on the results, and not the physical presence (Gajendran et al., 2015) .

In general, management in hybrid environments implies the balance of autonomy and control, flexibility and accountability, and technological competence and human-oriented management. These changing requirements bring about the need to have a more conceptualized approach to leadership strategies in the hybrid work environment.

1.3 Conceptual Rationale and Scope of the Study

The increasing use of hybrid work has greatly transformed organizational setups, expectations of employees and managerial practices. In the context in which organizations are still operating in hybrid environments, the issue of leadership has become an important aspect toward the effectiveness of how teams can work across the physical and virtual space. Hybrid work environments are complex in nature and thus, leaders need to manage teams that are geographically dispersed, achieve effective communication and keep employees engaged whilst balancing flexibility and accountability. The literature on the topic offers important information regarding different issues of remote and hybrid leadership, such as communication practices, trust-building, and digital competencies. Nonetheless, these dimensions are frequently studied separately, which leads to a disjointed view of the topic of leadership effectiveness in hybrid work settings (Contreras et al., 2020; Garzoni et al., 2019)). Simultaneously, hybrid work presents interrelated challenges of coordination problems, performance monitoring issues and work-life imbalance that cannot be fully addressed using isolated leadership approaches.

Conceptually, there is a necessity to combine various dimensions of leadership and present them in an integrated framework that mirrors the realities of hybrid work. Such environments may not have one style or one role of leadership but require a combination of transformational, trust-based, inclusive and digitally competent practices, which are facilitated by effective communication strategies. The combination of these leadership approaches has a strong impact on the key employee outcomes such as the team performance, productivity, job satisfaction, well-being, and work-life balance. Moreover, the applicability of such a framework becomes even more important in the context of the IT sector, where hybrid work is a common practice, and teams work in highly dynamic and technologically-driven settings. The intricacy of managing diverse and distributed teams requires a systematic knowledge on how leadership strategies interrelate and lead to organizational effectiveness. In this regard, the current research project is expected to establish a well-developed conceptual framework to connect the leadership strategies to the outcomes of employees working in hybrid work settings. The research attempt aims at offering a comprehensive view of the leadership in hybrid teams and provide a platform where future research and practice can be done.

2. Review Of Literature

2.1 Evolution of Hybrid Work in Contemporary Organizations

Hybrid work has become a big change in the current organizational design, a shift in conventional office-based work to flexible and technology-enabled work arrangements. In the past, organizations operated under a centralized system with employees being mandatory in a physical sense, which allowed managers to have direct supervision and control. Nevertheless, the development of digital technologies and the growing process of globalisation gradually made remote working possible and thus formed the basis of hybrid work models (Allen et al., 2021)).

The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to this shift and undertook the task of transitioning to remote work on an unprecedented scale. Although remote work has originally become a need, it later turned into a strategic decision as organizations realized that it is beneficial in terms of productivity, cost efficiency, and employee satisfaction (Carillo et al., 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021)). Hybrid work has become a prevailing model that balances the flexibility of remote work with the collaborative benefits of office-based work in place in the post-pandemic period.

Flexibility in time and location, use of digital communication tools and management of geographically dispersed work teams characterize hybrid work. Although it has a number of benefits, including enhanced work-life balance and shortened commuting time, it also presents the challenges of communication, coordination, and engagement with employees (Bloom et al., 2024; Ipsen et al., 2021)). These complications require a re-evaluation of conventional management practices and especially leadership.

2.2 Transitioning Role of Leadership in Hybrid Work Environments.

The shift to hybrid work has greatly changed the character of leadership in organizations. Conventional leadership approaches that focused on hierarchical control, and direct supervision is becoming ineffective in hybrid

environments where employees work across various locations. Rather, leadership has moved towards more adaptive, flexible, and technology-oriented leadership approaches.

Leaders in the hybrid environment must be able to lead geographically dispersed and digitally linked teams. This necessitates the change in the leadership from control-based leadership to trust-based and outcome-oriented leadership. The leaders should be concerned with relationship-building, proper communication, and collaboration without the need to be physically present (Contreras et al., 2020)).

Additionally, the leadership of hybrid teams entails handling the different needs and work preferences of the employees. Other employees might like working remotely, whereas some employees might like to interact with others at the office. This diversity necessitates leaders to be open and adaptable to allow the various working styles. Moreover, leaders need to deal with such challenges as employee isolation, decreased visibility, and work-life imbalance, more extreme in hybrid settings.

This changing status of leadership makes it worthwhile to develop a detailed approach to leadership strategies that would be able to adequately address the challenges of a hybrid work environment.

2.3 Theoretical Lenses of Leadership in Hybrid Work.

To learn about the effectiveness of leadership in a hybrid work environment, it is necessary to have a solid theoretical background. A number of developed theories can give a clue to the causes of leadership on employee behaviour and organizational performance.

2.3.1 Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory focuses on how leaders can inspire and motivate employees to attain greater levels of performance through creating a shared vision and encouraging innovation (Bass and Riggio, 2006)). Transformational leadership has a special place in hybrid work settings, where supervision is not as direct.

Leaders who embrace this style believe in empowering employees, promote creativity, and promote individual development. This will be useful in ensuring that employees are motivated and engaged regardless of the distance. Studies point out that transformational leadership positively influences team performance, innovation, and job satisfaction in remote and hybrid environments (Boccoli et al., 2024)).

2.3.2 Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) Theory

The LMX Theory is concerned with how good the relations between leaders and employees are. Quality relationships that are based on trust, respect and open communication result in better employee results, such as increased satisfaction and performance (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)).

When operating in hybrid environments, it is difficult to maintain good leader-employee relationship since they do not have time to interact with each other face-to-face. Yet it is also more acute because good relations contribute to the alleviation of a sense of isolation and to improve the cohesion of the team. Leaders who take the time to develop exchanges of high quality can enhance the engagement and productivity of hybrid teams.

2.3.3 Social Exchange Theory

The Social Exchange Theory is used to explain the nature of relationships within organizations in terms of reciprocal interactions based on trust and perceived fairness (Blau, 1964). When leaders treat their employees positively, the latter will more often reciprocate the positive treatment.

Fairness, transparency and support are some of the leadership practices that can be applied in hybrid work setups to enhance the exchange relationships. Employees are more likely to engage in positive behaviours at work, and be more engaged when they see that their effort is appreciated and their well-being is a priority.

2.3.4 Job Demands–Resources (JDR) Theory

The Job DemandsResources Theory gives a context of comprehending the impact that job characteristics have on the well-being and performance of employees. Hybrid work poses new job demands such as communication, coordination, and blurred work and life boundaries.

Leadership is one of the most important resources that can help to alleviate these demands. Leadership practices, which are supportive, e.g. flexibilities, clear guidance and emotional support, help to reduce stress and improve the well-being of employees (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007)).

2.3.5 Media Richness Theory

Richness Theory of Media expounds on the fact that the effectiveness of communication is dependent on the richness of the communication medium (Daft and Lengel, 1986) . In hybrid workplaces, when communicating is conducted mostly via digital platforms, it is necessary to choose the right medium.

Complex tasks should be carried out through rich communication tools, including video conferencing, whereas simple tasks can be handled with the help of simpler communication channels, such as emails. Communication strategies can be used to minimise misunderstanding and enhance coordination among hybrid teams.

2.4 Leadership Strategies that are important in Hybrid Teams.

The literature has also listed some of the leadership strategies that are important in the management of hybrid teams. These approaches are indicative of the multidimensional aspects of leadership in the hybrid workplace.

2.4.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership enables leaders to inspire and motivate employees, fostering innovation and engagement. This method contributes to the purpose and alignment among team members despite the physical barrier even in hybrid settings (Boccoli et al., 2024) .

2.4.2 Trust-Based Leadership

Leadership that is based on trust is necessary to deal with employees working on their own. Trust helps in fostering cooperation, lessening doubts and improving group performance. Transparent and fair leaders are capable of establishing good trust relationships within hybrid teams (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995)).

2.4.3 Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership is all about making all the employees, no matter their work address, feel inclusive and valued. This is specifically crucial in hybrid teams, in which remote workers might feel out of the decision-making process (Hopkins and Bardoel, 2023)).

2.4.4 Digital Leadership Competence

Digital leadership competence is the skill of leaders to successfully employ technology to run teams. The proficient leaders with skills in digital tools have the potential to improve communication, coordination, and productivity in hybrid work environments (Garzoni et al., 2019) .

2.4.5 Communication Strategies

Leadership in hybrid teams has had a foundation on effective communication. To achieve alignment and collaboration, leaders have to ensure that the communication is clear, consistent and transparent (Mitchell, 2021)

2.5 Employee Outcomes Associated with Leadership in Hybrid Work

The leadership strategies play a crucial role in shaping employee and organizational performance in the hybrid workplaces.

2.5.1 Team Performance and Productivity

Good leadership results in better coordination, goal alignment and productivity. The provision of clear expectations and support by the leaders facilitates employees to work effectively in hybrid environments (Bloom et al., 2024).

2.5.2 Job Satisfaction

Recognition, inclusivity, and communication are leadership practices that help to increase job satisfaction. Feeling valued, employees have higher chances to stay engaged and committed (Berber et al., 2022) .

2.5.3 Employee Well-being and Work–Life Balance

Working hybrid may create a work life-boundary, which results in stress and burnout. Leadership is a very important aspect in ensuring that employees are well-being by ensuring that they are as flexible as possible and adopting healthy work practices (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) .

2.6 Synthesis of Literature

The literature review has shown that leadership is one of the key factors that influence the success of hybrid working conditions. Although the current research seems to emphasize the significance of the individual leadership strategies, the research fails to integrate these strategies. Hybrid work demands a mixture of leadership approaches that jointly impact employee performances.

Empirical studies and theoretical frameworks propose that leadership influences employee performance, satisfaction and well being through various processes (motivation, trust, communication, and resource support). Nevertheless, the lack of a single conceptual framework limits a complete comprehension of the effectiveness of leadership in hybrid teams.

This highlights the importance of coming up with an integrated conceptual model that would capture the multidimensional nature of leadership in a hybrid work setup.

3. Research Gap

A critical analysis of the available literature shows that, even though the current level of scholarly interest in the field of hybrid work and leadership is growing, the existing body of knowledge in the field is still incomplete and underdeveloped. Much of the previous research has been dedicated to the analysis of individual dimensions of leadership- such as communication practices, trust-building mechanisms, digital competence, and flexibility- without sufficiently integrating the dimensions into a complete and unified framework (Contreras et al., 2020; Garzoni et al., 2019)). Although empirical research can be valuable in the analysis of the positive effect of relevant leadership styles, particularly transformational, inclusive, and supportive leadership, on such outcomes as employee engagement, productivity, and job satisfaction (Boccoli et al., 2024; Hopkins and Bardoel, 2023) they are inclined to treat these constructs separately. As a result, minimal knowledge is available on how various leadership strategies can interact and work simultaneously in hybrid work environments, which are complex and multidimensional in nature. Furthermore, despite the fact that in the current literature, the most important issues related to hybrid work have been identified, such as a lack of communication, coordination difficulties, lack of trust, problems with performance monitoring, and work-life imbalance, they are often not systematically related to the corresponding leadership strategies, which restricts their practical applicability. The other significant weakness is the contextual bias of the literature wherein most research is concentrated in the West, where relative little attention is given to developing economies like India where organizational structures, cultural dynamic, and workforce features are very different. Such a gap is especially applicable when it comes to the sphere of the IT industry, which has been on the frontline of adopting hybrid work and has presented managerial and leadership challenges, which are unique to this field. Moreover, there is conceptual lack of clarity on the pathways through which leadership strategies drive key employee outcomes, such as team performance, productivity, job satisfaction, well-being and work life balance, particularly in distributed work environments and technology mediated work environments. As such, there is an urgent requirement to design an all inclusive and integrative conceptual framework that synthesizes various dimensions of leadership and explains their collective impact on employee and organizational performance in hybrid teams to not only understand the subject but also to gain practical significance in this new field of research.

4. Theoretical Framework

The current research is based on an integrative theoretical approach to the study that relies on a number of complementary theories to explain the impact leadership strategies have on employee outcomes in hybrid work settings. Transformational Leadership Theory at its most basic level is what provides the background to the

explanation of how leaders inspire, motivate and intellectually stimulate employees to achieve higher levels of performance particularly in an environment where close supervision of employees is limited (Bass and Riggio, 2006) . This is supplemented by Leader member Exchange (LMX) Theory, which stresses the significance of high quality relationship between leaders and employees as a means of fostering trust, engagement and collaboration especially in geographically dispersed teams where interpersonal connections are more challenging to maintain (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) . This framework is further reinforced by Social Exchange Theory that explains how leadership behaviours founded on fairness, support, and recognition can build reciprocal relationships that influence the employees to respond by being more committed, productive, and generate positive work attitudes (Blau, 1964). Besides that, Job Demands/Resources (JDR) Theory offers a useful way of looking at how leadership is a critical resource in buffering the demands of hybrid work, which include communication difficulties, role ambiguity and work-life imbalance, thereby improving employee well-being and performance (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) . Moreover Media Richness Theory can provide us with the understanding of how the proper choice of communication channels can help to increase the clarity, reduce the number of misunderstandings and enhance the coordination of team members actions in a hybrid environment (Daft and Lengel, 1986)). Combined, these theories offer a multidimensional and comprehensive basis on which one can study the issue of leadership in a hybrid working environment, which suggests that effective leadership is not rooted in one approach but is rather a combination of motivational, relational, resource-based, and communication-oriented approaches that jointly affect such key employee outcomes as team performance, productivity, job satisfaction, well-being and work-life balance.

5. Problem Statement And Objectives

The shift that has occurred very swiftly in the traditional work model to the hybrid work model has had a significant impact on the dynamics of team management, especially in knowledge intensive sectors like Information Technology where employees work both in the physical and virtual environment. Although hybrid work has several benefits, including flexibility, an improved job satisfaction level, and possibly increased productivity, it is also associated with a set of complex issues (Bloom et al., 2024; Hendriks et al., 2024) that include communication gaps, coordination challenges, lack of trust, performance monitoring, and work-life balance (Bloom et al., 2024; Hendriks et al., 2024)). The current literature recognizes the paramount importance of leadership in the context of these challenges; however, it is largely fragmented, with the studies focusing on the separate aspects of leadership effectiveness in hybrid environments such as communication, trust, or digital competence instead of providing a comprehensive understanding of leadership effectiveness in hybrid settings (Contreras et al., 2020; Garzoni et al., 2019)). Besides, conceptual clarity in understanding how various leadership strategies interact to produce significant results in key employee outcomes, such as team performance, productivity, job satisfaction, well-being, and work life balance is limited, especially in the context of the IT industry where hybrid work is widely practiced. In this respect, the present study aims to fill this gap by creating a coherent conceptual body of knowledge on leadership in hybrid work teams, with the specific objectives of identifying key leadership strategies, which apply to the hybrid work environment, and proposing an integrated framework, which explains the role of leadership in enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of the hybrid work environment.

6. Research Methodology

The current research follows a conceptual research design, which seeks to formulate an integrated theory that can connect leadership strategies and employee outcomes in hybrid work environments. In contrast to empirical research, a systematic and critical review of the existing literature is used in this research; the data used in this research is based on peer-reviewed journal articles, books, scholarly reports, and so on, devoted to the topics of hybrid work, leadership theories, and organizational behaviour. Conceptual research is specifically the most appropriate in the current areas of development, hybrid work, where the theoretical integration of the theoretical components is necessary to form a systematic view of complex phenomena (Gifford, 2022)). The paper is structured as a literature review in a structured manner where relevant literature was identified using key themes

like hybrid work, leadership strategies, digital leadership, and employee outcomes. The choice of literature is intended to cover both the empirical research done recently and the theoretical material that underpins the research, so as to achieve a balance between the current relevance and theoretical content. Previous studies on hybrid and remote work have noted the significance of leadership in modifying productivity, job satisfaction, and well-being but have tended to study these relationships individually (Contreras et al., 2020; Bloom et al., 2024)).

The thematic analysis method is used to determine significant constructs and common patterns in the literature. Transformational leadership, trust based leadership, inclusive leadership, digital leadership competence and communication practices are identified as critical independent variables whereas employee outcomes such as team performance, productivity, job satisfaction, well-being and work life balance are identified as dependent variables. This categorization is justified by the previous researches which underline the value of leadership as one of the main determinants of employee behaviour and organizational performance in the hybrid working conditions (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Hopkins and Bardoel, 2023) . On the basis of this synthesis, the paper builds a conceptual framework that incorporates various leadership dimensions into a single conceptual framework. The framework is also justified by developing propositions, in which the relationship between variables is logically derived out of established theories like Transformational Leadership Theory, LMX Theory, Social Exchange Theory and Job DemandsResources Theory. This method concurs with conceptual research practices in which theoretical reasoning is applied to explain relations between constructs and provide a foundation on which future empirical tests can be based. The study focuses on theoretical integration, logical coherence and conceptual clarity to ensure rigor and coherence. The study presents a holistic knowledge of the leadership in a hybrid work setting by synthesizing various theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. Even though the study lacks empirical validation; it presents a solid foundation upon which future research can be conducted empirically through quantitative or mixed methods.

7. Conceptual Model Development

7.1 Introduction to the Conceptual Model

The shift to a hybrid form of work has radically changed the organization and operations of contemporary organizations, especially those that focus on knowledge such as Information Technology. The nature of hybrid work environments is complex in its essence as such environments encompass the management of teams which operate both in physical space and in virtual space and often at different levels of engagement, visibility, and coordination. These complexities bring new challenges in terms of communication, trust-building, collaboration, performance monitoring and employee well-being.

Leadership is a very important process in such environments and through it, organizations are able to cope with these challenges. Nevertheless, the ever-changing character of hybrid work implies that no particular leadership style can be adequate to meet the expectations of all the organizational needs. Rather, leadership in hybrid environments is necessarily multidimensional and that it requires a mixture of motivational, relational, technological, and communication-oriented leadership approaches.

Based on existing theoretical and empirical sources, the present study constructs an integrated conceptual model explaining the role of various leadership strategies in hybrid work environment being played. The model is based on the well-established theoretical perspectives, such as Transformational Leadership Theory, Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Job Demands Resources (JDR) Theory, and Media Richness Theory. Together these theories offer a holistic approach to the understanding of how the leadership behaviours influence employee attitudes, behaviours and performance within distributed work environments.

7.2 Conceptualization of Leadership Strategies (Independent Variables)

Leadership practices in the hybrid work setting go beyond the traditional supervisory role and incorporate a spectrum of behaviours that enable coordination, motivation and engagement in distributed teams. According to the literature, five major dimensions of leadership have been singled out as being at the center of the proposed conceptual model.

7.2.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership will be of great help in hybrid environments by allowing leaders to inspire, motivate, and engage employees intellectually in spite of physical distance. This type of leadership is aimed at developing a strong vision, promoting innovations and encouraging employees to go beyond expectations with the help of intrinsic motivation (Bass and Riggio, 2006)).

Employees employed in hybrid work environments have been known to work with a high level of autonomy, which is likely to lead to disengagement unless managed appropriately. Transformational leaders overcome this challenge by offering direction, meaning and purpose, which increases the employee commitment and involvement. Moreover, through promoting creativity and intellectual appeal, transformational leadership assists in innovation and flexibility, which are essential in dynamic workplaces.

Empirical studies indicate that transformational leadership has a positive impact on employee engagement, creativity, and team performance, especially in remote and hybrid settings (Boccoli et al., 2024)). In that way, it is an underlining leadership approach on improving the individual and team level performances.

7.2.2 Trust-Based Leadership

The main element of effective management that is relevant in the hybrid types of work where employees do not physically present and cannot be consistently monitored is the element of trust-based leadership. Trust in these environments substitutes the conventional control mechanisms and forms a determinant of employee behaviour and performance.

The leadership style based on trust focuses on the following: transparency, fairness, consistency, and psychological safety. When leaders show trust to their employees, they give them the power to own their work which improves accountability and motivation. Simultaneously, employees who believe in their leaders tend to be more open in communication, exchange ideas and collaborate effectively.

Theoretically, trust is strongly associated with Leader Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, which emphasizes that high-quality relationships between leaders and employees are important in enhancing job satisfaction, commitment and performance (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995)). Trust is even more essential in hybrid teams where there is limited face-to-face interaction, thus limiting the ability to develop trust in a team.

7.2.3 Inclusive Leadership

The concept of inclusive leadership is especially applicable to hybrid workplaces where differences can be noted between remote and in-office workers. Workers who work at home can feel less visible, less involved in decision-making, and feel like they are not part of the team dynamics.

Inclusive leadership seeks to overcome such challenges by ensuring that all the employees feel valued, respected and incorporated irrespective of where they work. It facilitates equal opportunity to participate, promote different perspectives, and promote a sense of belongingness among the team members.

Inclusive leadership is critical towards team cohesion and engagement in hybrid environments. The studies show that inclusive practices lead to employee satisfaction, teamwork, and overall performance of the team (Hopkins and Bardoel, 2023)). Inclusive leadership helps to make the workplace less isolating and unequal, thus making it more favorable and productive.

7.2.4 Digital Leadership Competence

Digital leadership competence can be defined as the capacity of a leader to successfully use digital technologies to manage a team, facilitate communication, and coordinate work in hybrid workplaces. Since hybrid work greatly depends on the use of digital platforms, technological expertise is an important leadership skill.

Leaders should not be just technically competent but have the ability to use digital tools strategically to improve collaboration and decision-making. This involves the use of the right tools in the communication, the management of the virtual workflow, and the provision of the employees with the right tools to use the technology effectively.

Adaptive Structuration Theory is one of the theories that support the concept of digital leadership competence because it focuses on the interaction between the technology and organizational behaviour. Those leaders who

successfully introduce technology into the work process can work more efficiently, reduce the number of coordination issues, and improve team performance (Garzoni et al., 2019) .

7.2.5 Communication Strategies

One of the most essential aspects of leadership in the hybrid work setting is communication. Lack of physical presence and face-to-face communication predisposes misunderstanding, misalignment, and less involvement.

The communication strategies include being clear, consistent, transparent and the right choice of communication channels. The leaders should make sure that information is shared not only on time but also that employees have a chance to get feedback and have an opportunity to interact.

Media Richness Theory is a useful conceptual framework that can be used in understanding the effectiveness of communication suggesting that complex tasks require more complex communication media, e.g. video conferencing, whereas simple tasks can be addressed through simpler communication media, e.g. emails (Daft and Lengel, 1986).

Effective communication practices can be used to foster trust, enhance coordination, and sustain alignment in a hybrid team, which enhances overall performance.

7.3 Conceptualization of Employee Outcomes (Dependent Variables)

Employee outcomes are the measures of the success of leadership strategy in hybrid work environment. These are multidimensional results which portray the individual performance as well as the organizational performance.

7.3.1 Team Performance

Team performance can be defined as the capacity of the team members to work cohesively towards the achievement of organizational objectives. In hybrid environments, the performance of a team rests on the coordination, communication and alignment among team members.

Leadership is a very crucial factor in enabling collaboration and also keeping team members on track towards the same goals. Leadership yields better coordination and less inefficiencies, resulting in improved team outcomes (Bloom et al., 2024) .

7.3.2 Employee Productivity

Leadership practices like allowing autonomy, giving clear expectations and support influence the productivity of the employees. The issue of productivity in a hybrid working environment is mostly associated with outcome-related performance instead of being present.

Efficiency and performance can be improved by the leaders empowering workers and delivering the required resources. The literature has shown that supportive and flexible leadership practices have a positive influence on productivity in a hybrid setting (Gajendran et al., 2015) .

7.3.3 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is the general attitude of the employees towards the work environment and the support provided by the leadership. Recognition, inclusivity, and communication are some of the leadership practices that have a significant impact on the level of employee satisfaction.

Feeling valued and supported employees are more inclined to be engaged and commit themselves to work. Studies suggest that leadership plays a key role in enhancing job satisfaction in flexible work arrangements (Berber et al., 2022) .

7.3.4 Employee Well-being

Employee well being refers to the physical, mental and emotional well being of the employees. Blurred work-life boundaries and heightened work demands, can cause stress in hybrid work.

Leadership is a very important resource when it comes to supporting the well-being of employees (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) by being flexible, reducing workload stress, and providing emotional support.

7.3.5 Work–Life Balance

A major issue in the hybrid work setting is work-life balance where the employee is likely to struggle distinguishing between work and personal life.

The leaders can contribute significantly to the establishment of balance through realistic expectations and the promotion of flexible work practices. Leadership can be used to minimize burnout and enhance employee satisfaction (Allen et al., 2021) .

7.4 Integrated Conceptual Model

The conceptual model proposed indicates that the combination of leadership strategies can affect employee outcomes in hybrid work environments. These relationships do not exist alone but are interrelated with various dimensions of leadership interacting to influence employee behaviour and performance.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the study



Developed by Researcher

7.5 Theoretical Integration and Model Justification

There are various theoretical views that underpin the proposed model. Transformational leadership explicates motivation and engagement, LMX theory explicates the quality of relationships, Social Exchange Theory explicates reciprocal behaviour, JDR theory explicates well-being and resource allocation, and Media Richness Theory explicates the effectiveness of the communication.

Combining these theories can give a comprehensive insight into leadership in hybrid environments, where the efficacy of leadership is contingent upon a combination of various strategies as opposed to a single strategy.

7.6 Implications of the Conceptual Model

The conceptual model provides theoretical and practical contributions. In theory, it incorporates the various views of leadership into a single model. In practical terms, it guides organization in formulating effective leadership strategies of hybrid team.

The model can also be used as a basis of future empirical studies in which the relationships proposed in the model can be tested and validated.

8. Propositions Development

Based on the conceptual model and justified by the available theoretical and empirical literature, the following propositions can be made: All propositions describe the relationship that is expected to exist between leadership strategies and employee outcomes in hybrid work environments.

Table 8.1: Propositions Linking Leadership Strategies with Employee Outcomes

Proposition No.	Proposition Statement	Detailed Explanation with Theoretical Support.
P1	Transformational leadership has a positive effect on the team performance in a hybrid work environment.	As a transformational leader, you boost the performance of your team through the promotion of collaboration and shared vision, as well as motivating employees to accomplish the shared vision. In hybrid teams where physical contact is reduced, leaders have to resort to inspiration and not supervision. Transformational leaders promote innovation and focus the team members towards achieving the organizational goals thus enhancing coordination and effectiveness. Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass and Riggio, 2006) and empirical data that reveal enhanced team performance in a hybrid environment (Boccoli et al., 2024) support this relationship.
P2	In hybrid workplaces, transformational leadership has a positive impact on employee productivity.	Employees in a hybrid environment tend to work independently and therefore motivation forms an essential part of productivity. Transformational leaders increase intrinsic motivation by stimulating the intellect and providing personalized attention, which leads to increased efficiency and productivity. Leaders can decrease disengagement and enhance productivity by enabling a sense of purpose and engagement. This is in line with the motivation-based leadership views and the previous studies on hybrid productivity (Boccoli et al., 2024; Bloom et al., 2024) .
P3	Trust leadership has a positive impact on job satisfaction in hybrid workplaces.	The feeling of psychological safety, fairness, and respect in the case of trust-based leadership are essential to job satisfaction. Trust can be used to establish close relationships between leaders and employees in hybrid teams as some employees might feel isolated. The LMX Theory says that the quality of relationship results in greater satisfaction and commitment (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995)). Employees who feel trusted by the leaders would be more inclined to feel valued and happy with their work.
P4	Trust-based leadership has a positive impact on the well-being of employees who work in a hybrid environment.	One way through trust-based leadership is to minimize the stress and uncertainty that can affect employees in the workplace through the creation of a supportive working environment. Feeling trusted, employees feel less anxious and more independent, which helps to enhance better mental health. Social Exchange Theory supports this relationship by the fact that positive leadership behaviour results in positive employee results (Blau, 1964), and JDR theory where leadership is a resource that reduces stress (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) .
P5	Inclusive leadership has a positive impact on job satisfaction in hybrid work settings.	Inclusive leadership makes all employees, irrespective of their work location, feel appreciated and included. This minimizes the feeling of being excluded among the remote workers and improves engagement. When employees feel

		they have been treated fairly and are regarded as part of the organization, they have better contentment with the workplace. According to previous research, inclusive practices are a strong solution to job satisfaction and team cohesion (Hopkins and Bardoel, 2023)).
P6	Inclusive leadership has a positive effect on the team performance in a hybrid workplace.	Inclusive leadership encourages collaboration through fostering alternative views and participation on an equal basis. Inclusive practices are used in hybrid teams where certain employees might experience disconnection; therefore, the practices are used to enhance communication and coordination. This will result in improved decision-making and team performance. A sense of belonging is created, which enhances teamwork and group results as the inclusive leadership fosters a sense of belonging.
P7	Digital leadership competence has a positive effect on the productivity of employees working in a hybrid work environment.	Digital leadership competence allows leaders to utilize technology effectively, in communication, coordination, and performance management. With digital tools being the centre of attention in a hybrid working environment, leaders who are well versed in technology can facilitate workflow and eliminate inefficiencies. This enhances the productivity of employees and accomplishment of tasks. The studies emphasize the importance of digital leadership in promoting efficiency and performance of teams (Garzoni et al., 2019)).
P8	Digital leadership competence has a positive impact on team performance in hybrid work setups.	Leaders who are well versed with digital tools are able to enhance coordination and collaboration of distributed teams. Proper application of technology lowers communication barriers, and improves the integration of tasks. The result is better performance and goal accomplishment of teams in hybrid environments.
P9	Communication strategies are effective and positively affect team performance in the hybrid work environment.	In hybrid teams, where face-to-face communication is absent, misunderstandings may occur as a result of a lack of face-to-face communication. Leaders who embrace effective and systematic communication behaviors improve coordination and alignment. According to Media Richness Theory, effective communication is enhanced using the right media channels (Daft and Lengel, 1986)). Having good communication enhances teamwork and boosts team performance.
P10	Effective communication strategies positively influence work-life balance in hybrid work environments.	Effective communication assists employees to deal with expectation and limits between work and personal life. Effective leaders can avoid work overload and decrease ambiguity, thus, facilitating the work-life balance. Studies show that employee wellness and burnout rates decrease in a hybrid environment with the support of structured communication and leadership practices (Allen et al., 2021) .

The set of propositions suggested is the culmination of the thesis statement that the effectiveness of leadership in hybrid work settings is not controlled by a single style of leadership but by multiple, interrelated leadership styles. Transformational leadership has the primary positive impact on the motivation, engagement and performance through providing a vision and direction, and through trust-based leadership enhancing psychological safety, reducing uncertainty and improving employee satisfaction and well-being. Inclusive leadership makes all employees, irrespective of their place of work feel appreciated and actively engaged, and therefore make

collaboration and team cohesion effective. Simultaneously, digital leadership competence allows the leaders to successfully use technological tools to coordinate and communicate with other team members, which is critical in managing geographically dispersed teams. Communication strategies also serve as an important linking mechanism that guarantees clarity, alignment, and boundary management, which in turn impacts team performance and work-life balance. Based on the various theoretical perspectives which include Transformational Leadership Theory, LMX Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Job Demands Resources Theory, and Media Richness Theory, these propositions combine to propose that leadership styles work together in an integrated manner to influence key employee outcomes such as team performance, productivity, job satisfaction, well-being, and work-life balance in hybrid work environments.

9. Discussion

The current conceptual research offers a comprehensive insight into the leadership as a core and multidimensional outcome determinant of effectiveness in hybrid work settings. The proposed framework and the related propositions all tend to imply that leadership in the hybrid environment cannot be reduced to a single style or functional dimension; on the contrary, it requires that a variety of complementary strategies that can address both structural and human-centric issues are integrated. The results suggest that transformational leadership is critical in maintaining employee motivation, engagement, and goal alignment in work environments that are defined by limited physical interactions, thus compensating the lack of direct supervision (Bass and Riggio 2006; Boccoli et al., 2024)]. At the same time, the concept of trust-based leadership can be seen as a mechanism that underpins the shift of traditional control-oriented approaches to the ones that are more people-centered and considerate of their needs and interests. This is more so in hybrid teams where they rely on trust to enhance psychological safety, reduce uncertainty and strengthen interpersonal relationships as highlighted by Leader Member Exchange (LMX) Theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) .

Moreover, the paper highlights the significance of inclusive leadership in resolving the gaps between distant and in-office workers. Hybrid work arrangements tend to produce disparities in visibility, participation, and access to opportunities; inclusive leadership helps to reduce these problems by creating a sense of belonging and providing equitable participation (Hopkins and Bardoel, 2023)). Moreover, digital leadership competence is also recognized as one of the essential capabilities that allow the leaders to adequately address the technological-mediated work processes. Seeing that the hybrid form of work requires a heavy dependence on digital platforms to communicate and coordinate with each other, the digital skills of leaders will be more suitable to improve the effectiveness and performance of their team (Garzoni et al., 2019)). Communication strategies also serve as an important integrative process bridging all the dimensions of leadership. Effective communication is also known to promote coordination and alignment, as well as promote trust-building, inclusivity, and boundary management. Media Richness Theory gives support to this view by emphasizing on the need to adopt the right communication channels depending on the complexity of the task to enhance clarity and minimize misunderstandings (Daft and Lengel, 1986) . The analysis further indicates that leadership impacts employee outcome in various ways, such as motivation, relational exchange, provision of resources, and effectiveness in communication. These pathways are supported by the existing theoretical perspectives including Transformational Leadership Theory, LMX Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Job Demandsresources (JDR) Theory which together explain how leadership behaviours influence employee attitudes, well-being, and performance in hybrid settings (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) . Notably, the challenges that come with hybrid work include barriers to communication, difficulties in coordination, and work-life imbalance that require adaptive and flexible leadership styles instead of the traditional control-based leadership styles (Contreras et al., 2020)). All in all, the discussion highlights that the hybrid work environment success depends on how flexibly and accountably, autonomy and coordination, and technological efficiency and human connection the leaders balance their approach. It also supports the necessity of organizations to implement a holistic perspective on leadership development that encompasses a wide range of competencies and aligns the practices of leadership with the changing needs of the hybrid work systems.

10. Implications And Limitations

10.1 Theoretical Implications

The current study is a great contribution to the existing literature through the development of an integrated conceptual framework that integrates several leadership dimensions within the framework of hybrid work environments. In contrast to the previous studies, which tend to investigate the constructs of leadership, including: communication, trust, or inclusive and digital leadership and communication strategies, in one paper, the present study takes a holistic approach by combining transformational, trust-based, inclusive, and digital leadership and communication strategies in a single model. This synthesis helps to clarify conceptually the effectiveness of leadership in hybrid environments and to solve the fragmented nature of current research (Contreras et al., 2020; Garzoni et al., 2019) .

Moreover, the research has enhanced its theoretical background by using several established theories, such as Transformational Leadership Theory, Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Job Demands Resources (JDR) Theory, and Media Richness Theory. Combination of these theories gives a multidimensional view of how leadership affects the outcome of the employees through the following mechanisms: motivation, relational exchange, resource provision as well as effectiveness in communication. In this way, the research can be used to further develop the theory of leadership by placing it in the context of hybrid work environments and providing an extensive framework that can be used in future research.

10.2 Practical Implications

Practically, the study is a useful source of information to managers, organizations, and policymakers working in hybrid places of work. These findings underscore the fact that leaders need to leave their control-based leadership practices behind and adopt a more flexible, trust-based, and technology-enabled leadership practices. The suggested framework can help organizations to develop leadership development programs that target the improvement of key competencies, including effective communication, digital skills, inclusivity, and employee support.

It is also noted that creating a supportive and inclusive work culture that will guarantee equal participation and engagement of both remote and in-office employees is important. Through trust-based and inclusive leadership practices, organizations can enhance employee satisfaction, lessen their sense of isolation, and bolster the effectiveness of their teams. Also, the results highlight the importance of leadership in facilitating the well being and work life balance of the employees by ensuring that clear expectations are set, flexibility is encouraged and burnout is prevented.

These implications are especially applicable when it comes to the IT industry, where hybrid work is a prevalent trend. The successful combination of various leadership strategies can help to boost productivity, enhance performance, and achieve sustainable organizational performance in dynamic and technology-driven environments.

10.3 Limitations of the Study

Although it has made contributions, the study has some limitations that need to be noted. To begin with, the study is conceptual, and it does not entail empirical testing of the suggested framework. The connections between the leadership strategy and employee performance are based on hypothetical reasoning and literature, which might need additional empirical studies to verify their validity.

Second, the research is focused mostly on hybrid workplaces in the IT industry, which might restrict the ability of the research findings to be generalized to other industries or organizational settings. Various industries can have different work dynamics, level of technological adoption and leadership needs.

Third, although the framework has taken into consideration some fundamental dimensions of leadership, other potential influencing factors including organizational culture, individual employee characteristics and external environmental conditions have not been explicitly factored into the framework. All these factors can also be a major contributor to the development of the effectiveness of leadership in hybrid environments.

Lastly, due to the fast changing environment of hybrid work it is possible that the leadership practices and organizational dynamics will be further changing over time. Thus, the suggested framework can be refined and adjusted to in the following working conditions.

11. Conclusion And Future Scope

The current research offers comprehensive and integrative conceptual knowledge of leadership in hybrid workplaces by providing a multidimensional framework that relates key leadership strategies, including transformational leadership, trust-based leadership, inclusive leadership, digital leadership competence, and communication practices, with the critical employee outcomes, such as team performance, productivity, job satisfaction, well-being, and work-life balance. The research shows that hybrid work as a new organizational paradigm presents complex problems associated with coordination, communication, trust, and engagement with employees, which cannot be effectively solved by means of traditional leadership mechanisms. Rather, leadership in hybrid environments necessitates a transformation towards adaptive, flexible, and relationship oriented practices that focus on trust, inclusivity, and technological competence, and explicit communication. The combination of various theoretical perspectives, including Transformational Leadership Theory, Leader Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Job Demands Resources (JDR) Theory and Media Richness Theory, allows the study to develop a comprehensive perspective on the effectiveness of leadership and demonstrate that leadership can affect the outcomes of employees through interconnected processes of motivation, relational exchange, resource support, and communication efficiency. In addition, the research has made a contribution to the literature in that it has addressed the disjointedness of the previous literature and provided a coherent conceptual framework that can form a basis upon which future empirical studies can be carried out. Regarding the scope of the future, the study highlights the necessity of empirical validation of the proposed model based on quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method research across various industries and geographic settings to increase the generalizability of the proposed model. It is also possible that future studies explore how moderating and mediating variables, including organizational culture, technological readiness, employee personality traits, and organizational policies, moderate and mediate the relationship between leadership strategies and employee outcomes. Furthermore, longitudinal research may offer further insights regarding the transformation of leadership practices over time in response to ongoing changes in hybrid work models, and digital transformation. In general, the research highlights that successful leadership is a key facilitator of organizational performance in hybrid workplaces, and designing integrated and context-sensitive leadership strategies will be crucial in maintaining performance, promoting employee well-being, and navigating the future of work.

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