

Leadership for Hybrid Organizations: How Structure and Belonging Drive Engagement and Performance

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Abstract:

The introduction of hybrid working has also reshaped organizational leadership in the post-pandemic world, going against the grain of what we believed about engagement, coordination and visibility. This study examines the impact of employee engagement and performance on hybrid teams of employees due to the nature of the leadership behaviours involved, namely identity leadership, rhythm-setting and communication clarity. Based on the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model and the theory of e-leadership and psychological safety, the study follows a mixed methods approach, which includes survey data (N = 318 hybrid employees) and 18 semi-structured interviews with leaders from five knowledge intensive organizations. Results of quantitative analyses show that identity leadership and rhythm-setting are significant predictors of engagement and perceived performance ($\beta = .34, p < .001$ and $\beta = .21, p < .01$ respectively). Psychological safety partially mediates the above effects and trust partially moderates the relationship between remote days and perceived fairness ($\beta = .18, p < .01$). The qualitative analyses show three mechanisms of leadership that keep the hybrid teams cohesive and psychologically safe: predictable rhythms, deliberate identity work, and explicit practices of fairness. The study contributes to theory by bringing together concepts of identity leadership and rhythm-setting within the JD–R framework, and by further understanding the contextual moderating role of trust within hybrid work. On a practical level, the results highlight the need for intentional design of the hybrid leadership, which includes structured rhythms, identity practices that make sure everyone is included, and transparent evaluation. Leaders who create a psychologically safe space can turn the flexibility of hybrid working into an engagement and performance edge that can last for the long haul.

Keywords: Hybrid leadership, identity leadership, psychological safety, trust, job demands–resources, engagement, mixed methods.

Introduction

One of the most drastic changes in modern life in an organization is how it is moving towards a hybrid work model at an accelerated pace in the current globalized world. Hybrid models refers to a model the employees are in the office half a day and at home the other half-day, thereby completely altering the organizational way of organising, communicating and leading (Lauring, 2025). While hybrid work is a new phenomenon in the time of Covid-19, in most industries with knowledge-based jobs, it is a new normal. Research demonstrates that more than 60 percent of organizations all over the world are currently working under hybrid structure as a part of their long workforce plan (MIT Sloan Management Review, 2023). It's not a change in the structure of it, it is a re-establishment of meaning for leadership, collaboration and trust-building, when presence and proximity are no longer guaranteed. Hybrid work arrangements are associated with a number of advantages: they would become more flexible, lead to higher employee satisfaction, retention, and more diverse talent pool (Stanford, 2024). However, there are challenges for leaders as well in these benefits. In traditional organisations, leadership influence was traditionally rooted in unplanned contact and the mutual social practices of leadership and followers, and the presence of the leader. These natural "glue" builders have been wiped out in hybrid environments. The leadership that's expected now needs to be involved, balanced and to coordinate various types of leadership

presence. The problems are multidimensional: Communication problems occur when teams are operating in both physical and virtual space; the physical space has a higher visibility of the personnel working in it, that is, proximity does not ensure equality; and solidarity is lessened in the event that the team's rituals are lost (Kloepfer, 2025). This inevitably leads to the development of new skills, better communication, formation of regular schedules, and awareness of maintaining team identity and trust.

There are some theories of leadership which provide partial insights on these issues right now. Transformational and transactional leadership paradigms are based on vision, motivational techniques, and reward systems, and assume that the team is co-located and that everyone can see each other. It is better to use the modern models, such as e-leadership and identity leadership. E-leadership focuses on how leaders use digital communication and technology-mediated interaction to influence their team, while identity leadership is about the potential of leaders to construct a shared 'we' meaning and identity, based on a shared value and purpose, that brings team members together (Malhotra et al., 2007; Shi, 2024). Hybrid leaders need to incorporate the two viewpoints. They need to have an online presence and coordination, rely on technological tools and evolve a shared identity that transcends space and psychology. Hybrid environment leadership thus goes past supervision or coordination to be the planned design of both social and structural systems that render distributed work sustainable (Lauring, 2025). The current paper will combine three theoretical approaches: the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, e-leadership theory and identity leadership in order to come up with an empirically testable Model of hybrid leadership effectiveness. According to the JD-R framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), the work characteristics are conceptualized as work demands and the work strain on one hand, and work resources and the work motivation and engagement on the other. Jobs resources consist of construct of leadership behaviors that offer clarity, predictability, and social support to employees, which helps them deal with ambiguity of the hybrid setting. In this manner, e-leadership brings the topic to the fore, emphasising that leaders must be visible and aligned, even when in various locations, with support from digital tools (Zeuge et al., 2020). This layer of identity leadership is emotional and cultural, and shows that the shared identity, who we are together, can be a stabilising factor when we are not together physically. In tandem with these different frameworks, the present paper takes hybrid leadership to mean managing structure and meaning, with rhythm and clarity managing the structure and identity and trust managing the meaning.

The heart of this discussion is that leadership in a hybrid workplace is about creating predictable rhythms to enable collective operations — and not about managing people. The hybrid teams will rapidly switch from online to offline teams and teams that do not work synchronously will be demobilized without an awareness of it. Those managers who establish regular anchor days, team rituals and plans for open communication, provide a rhythm for the team's role and work (MIT Sloan Management Review, 2023). This type of rhythm-setting is not simply logistical, but also psychological, and incorporates less ambiguity and increases perceived fairness. There's also a need for identity leadership, in addition to rhythm. A sense of belonging is enhanced through leaders' efforts of reinforcing shared values, celebrating team accomplishments, and sharing a powerful we-ness story that transcends geographic boundaries (Shi, 2024). Hybrid teams are a mix of rhythm and identity: They have a sense of structural cohesion, of emotional connection. The main psychological processes that connect the leadership behaviors and outcomes are psychological safety and trust. Psychological safety is the common conviction that an individual may be able to voice his or her views, confess and take interpersonal risks without apprehension of being punished (Edmondson, 2019). With hybrid teams, safety is easily broken, especially when some team members are working remotely, may not feel comfortable voicing their opinions, or feel their voice isn't being heard in a hybrid conversation (Coulston, 2025). Leaders who Model are vulnerable, open to participation, and even level participants' voice across modes to strengthen this safety, enhance engagement and learning. The role of how the employees understand hybrid dynamics is in turn the moderator, trust. High trust employees feel empowered by hybrid working, low trust employees see flexibility as it is being ignored or negatively skewed. There are two parts of trust; competence-based trust (confidence in the ability of a leader) and benevolence-based trust (confidence in fairness and care of a leader) (Kloepfer, 2025). Hybridised systems with less direct control should intentionally foster trust, be consistent, transparent and give equal recognition.

As leadership becomes more significant, leadership in the hybrid style is an under-researched field. Much of the literature produced is either conceptual or practitioner oriented, and provides frameworks with little quantitative

validation. The previous studies were often confused with full remote with the hybrid form, as they only considered the two-fold structure of the hybrid Model without taking into account the unique leadership challenge it entails (Zeuge et al., 2020). Moreover, the impact of the leadership behaviors on engagement (particularly the role of psychological safety and trust) has not been tested in an experimental way in a mixed workforce. Therefore, empirical research that combines the three streams of behavioral, structural and psychological perspectives is needed urgently to capture the leadership behaviors to shift hybrid flexibility into a sustained engagement and performance.

The current research has used a mixed-methods approach to examine how this is related to employee engagement and performance within hybrid teams, as this ability of identity leadership, rhythm-setting and communication clarity has not yet been studied. It also explores how psychological safety acts as a mediator between these relationships, as well as the moderation of the relationship between the remote intensity (i.e., number of remote days) and perceived fairness by trust. These are backed by quantitative data from 318 knowledge workers in five knowledge based companies, which is statistically supported. At the same time, qualitative interviews with leaders (N = 18) can be used to give contextual details of the ways in which the hybrid leaders create rhythms, build identity and control fairness. The articles included in the study are of both theoretical and practical nature. In principle it extends the JD-R model by adding the specific job resources of the hybrid model, namely leadership behaviors, as a factor that can increase engagement by fostering psychological safety. It also helps to support the identity leadership theory by showing how collective identity can be developed as a result of structural design (rhythms, rituals and visibility practices). So in practice, the results provide evidence-based guidance to organizations that are adjusting to today's evolution of hybrid work. In order to be effective in hybrid leadership, it needs to be planned: the communication needs to have a rhythm, the evaluation is open and the activities to build trust are clear. When structural predictability and relational authenticity are combined, it can be a framework for fragmentation and a foundation for sustainable performance for leaders as they facilitate hybrid work.

Literature Review

Organizations are becoming more flexible, increasingly mediated by digital devices, and there is a new interest in how leadership works in such organizations. Leadership is a phenomenon that is usually considered to be near, seen and felt (Yukl, 2013). These pillars are affected by hybrid work when teams are moved both physically and temporally. This chaos has resulted in the need of re-thinking the mechanisms by which leaders affect the motivation, engagement, and trust of followers when the followers have different perceptions of the workplace. Based on the new study, the effectiveness of hybrid leadership is situational and depends on the mutual sustaining capabilities in any mode of interaction: being able to create predictable patterns of cooperation, reinforce sense of identity, and build trust and psychological safety. The new study suggests that hybrid leadership is situational; that is, it requires the mutual sustaining capabilities in the interaction modes, which are: creating foreseeable patterns of cooperation, reinforcing sense of identity, building trust and psychological safety. The literature relevant to the research proposed can be summarized as follows: the concept of hybrid work; e-leadership; identity leadership; Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model; and twin psychological processes of trust and safety. Hybrid work is more than a working structure; it's a new social deal between employees and companies. The new hybrid working logic is multi-spatial, as the spatialization of home/work is always negotiated between both workplaces, says Lauring (2025). Contrary to all-remote work, hybrid models do not eliminate the possibility of physical togetherness instead of apportioning it unevenly, based on a certain role and organizational policies. This inequality gives rise to new equity dilemmas. The studies show that those who work more days in the office tend to be more visible and have a greater likelihood of being promoted: this is called proximity bias (MIT Sloan Management Review, 2023). Remote-heavy workers, on the other hand, reported higher levels of autonomy, and lower levels of social belonging (Coulston, 2025). The job of the leader in this type of setting is paradoxical, though – to be flexible yet cohesive and fair.

The empirical evidence highlights the susceptibility of team processes of hybrid settings. An analysis by Stanford (2024) of 10 international companies revealed that hybrid working is linked to higher retention rates, 35 percent greater than in full-time presence at the workplace. However, a lack of information, and especially information

that is not shared evenly among employees was frequently cited as a source of dissatisfaction. Likewise, Microsoft (2023) global survey has discovered that hybrid employees spend more of the time coordinating and less time in creative collaboration. The actions of leadership that re-establish the coordination and cohesion, therefore, become crucial. A leader who sets clear expectations for hybrid workdays, clarifies the anchor days and provides a clear means of communication can help minimize misinterpretations and improve the perceived equity (Lauring 2025). This is because leadership has no longer to do with the motivations of the individual, but with the organisation of the dispersed collaboration. The first theoretical foundation of the concept of leadership in hybrid organizations would be made based on the concept of e-leadership. The mediation of social influence by technology is e-leadership as first coined by Avolio and Kahai (2003) and later elaborated by Malhotra et al. (2007). The virtual or partially virtual team leaders are responsible for vision, monitoring progress and improving interpersonal relationships via digital communication. Zeuge et al. (2020) found that effective e-leaders strategically create and foster what they refer to as digital visibility, using various communication channels and platforms such as video calls, IM, and asynchronous platforms to keep the sense of being present. This is consistent with the social presence theory which suggests that the communicative media's capacity to warm, prompt and project non verbal messages is a function of trust and satisfaction (Short et al., 1976). The face-to-face behaviors should be utilized to complement e-leadership in the context of hybrids and leaders should be able to plan behaviors in two planes of interactions simultaneously. The team behind this combination, ensuring fair access and focus for both the remote and in-office teams, has boosted engagement and reduced turnover (Coulston, 2025).

But e-leadership cannot explain the emotional and identity related elements of hybrid work. The identity leadership model developed by Haslam et al. (2020, Shi, 2024), is a more complementary model. The ability to become a successful leader isn't just a function of what a leader does, it's a function of how a leader embodies and builds a feeling of unity that doesn't generally clash with who we are", according to the identity leadership theory. The influence of leadership comes about as a result of having the perception that the leader is a representative of the values and purpose of the group. This is attained with four important behaviors namely being an exemplary member of the group, serving the interests of the group, creating a sense of shared identity and entrenching that shared identity. The team leader's ability to communicate and embody a collective identity in multi-location teams, where team members are dispersed and do not have the same opportunities for informal communication, is key in maintaining a cohesive team. Shi (2024) discovered that identity leadership was an effective predictor of team identification and team performance in remote working environments and perceived unity mediated the relationship between identity leadership and team performance. The findings of this study suggest that incorporating hybrid may lead to a sense of disembodiment that may be mitigated by identity leadership. Actually, identity leadership is manifested through rituals, common language, and symbolic actions. Leaders can create a pilot for hybrid meetings by re-stating common goals, with participatory recognition (e.g., celebrate what people have contributed in both formats), or develop hybrid rituals, where there is continuity between formats. This helps to build a sense of belonging and purpose, which in turn promotes engagement. However, identity leadership must be complemented by the intentional structuring and coordination of time and presence, otherwise known as "rhythm setting." Although rhythm-setting has not received the theorization, its role has been considered by emerging practitioner-research (MIT Sloan Management Review, 2023). Leaders that build predictable patterns of hybrids, e.g. regular days of in- person collaboration, allow coordination and avoid inequities caused by the ad hoc scheduling. We say that, rhythm-setting is a structural basis, on which relations and identity-making of leadership are based.

The JD-R Model is a more extensive theoretical relationship between leadership practices and engagement. The JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) suggests that any work environment has both demands (things that demand effort) and resources (things that contribute to its goal accomplishment or minimize demand). Too many resources and too many workloads causes strain and burnout and too many resources encourages engagement. Among the demands in hybrid settings are the role ambiguity, digital fatigue and social isolation. Good communication, emotional support, and regularity in communication are all leadership behaviours that can give people resources to increase their motivation and minimise stresses (Coulston, 2025). Leadership can help neutralize the possible stressors by offering predictability in their structures and social importance, which can help

make them manageable and sustainable problems. There is a conceptual link between leadership and JD-R Model that has been empirically demonstrated in several studies (Tims et al., 2011; Schaufeli, 2017) but this link has not been demonstrated in hybrid contexts. The present study was based on this rationale where hybrid leadership behaviors were considered as job resources, and through the psychological processes, they would lead to an increase in engagement. Psychological safety is one of such mechanisms, which have been the focus of a significant amount of scholarly research concerning team performance and learning (Edmondson, 2019). Psychological safety is an inter-personal trust of the team that one can take risks without being afraid. In co-located teams, safety is built up with frequent informal interactions, communication tone and openness of the leader. There is the possibility that there may be misunderstandings or gaps in communication in hybrid team. Coulston (2025) observed that hybrid workers are less inclined to feel safe during virtual meetings compared to in-person ones, as they are unable to get visual cues or be spontaneous. The leadership is strong in combating this loss. Leaders who express that they're feeling uncertain, asking for different perspectives and setting an example set the tone for openness, even remotely. Its turn, psychological safety motivates involvement; it's not afraid of it and it's true.

Trust is a condition that does not mediate, it is a moderating condition between psychological safety and the way hybrid dynamics are perceived by the employees. Trust has always been known to be the core of good cooperation (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). Trust in hybrid environments, where leaders are unable to count on physical surveillance is more crucial and delicate. Kloefer (2025) develops his own understanding of hybrid trust, which he considers to be “hybrid” competence trust and benevolence trust, that is, trust in a leader and his fairness and good will. Empirical evidence indicates that, under conditions of high trust, remote flexibility is perceived as empowerment, whereas under conditions of low trust, it is perceived as neglect and/or inequity. In addition, the link between visibility and fairness is mediated by trust: when trust is low, the difference in the number of times that people see one another has a stronger effect to evoke perceptions of prejudice (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). This communication focuses on the importance of having clear and open communication of evaluation, promotion and recognition standards in hybrid leadership.

All these researches will culminate in a single Model of hybrid leadership. Good hybrid leaders are characterized by structure, rhythm, clarity and consistency and meaning, including identity work, inclusion and fairness. These are the types of things that produce psychological resources that help to dispute the default needs of hybrid working. Predictability and “familializing” employees leads to higher employee engagement and performance. Conversely, if there is no coordination of rhythms or care for identity, confusion, mistrust and disengagement occurs in the hybrid work. This integrative Model can be correlated with the essence of the JD-R Model: that leadership is a resource that leads to motivation and that is mediated by safety and moderated by trust. Some gaps are also identified during the review. Firstly, the empirical research on hybrid leadership remains scanty and partial. The bulk of literature is on remote or virtual leadership in general and fails to differentiate between fully virtual and hybrid leadership in some cases (Zeuge et al., 2020). Second, though, little systematic attention has been paid in the academic literature to the constructs of rhythm-setting and fairness mechanisms, which are a prominent aspect in practice. Third, while there has been extensive research focusing on the effect of psychological safety and trust on outcomes of leadership in isolation, few studies have examined their interaction and mediation to create moderate and mediate outcomes of leadership in hybrid conditions. To fill these gaps, hybrid complexity studies will have to be conducted through mixed methods, with statistical validation and qualitative richness, providing in addition to statistical correlations the strategies that leaders actually use to interact with hybrid complexity.

Methodology

Research Design

To fulfil the study objectives, the convergent mixed methods approach was used, combining the quantitative and qualitative data in the study to provide depth and breadth of analysis. This design was used because hybrid leadership is a multidimensional concept which has various measurable behaviors and various contextualities that cannot be fully understood by use of survey only. The quantitative part explored the hypothesized relationship

between the leadership behaviors, psychological processes and effects, while the qualitative part explored the practice of the leaders in the realities of organizational life. The design of the convergent approach allowed for both strands to mutually inform each other, so that statistical findings could be interpreted in the context of lived experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Research Setting and Participants

The analysis was performed in five knowledge-intensive companies, across various sectors: information technology (IT), consulting, marketing services, higher education administration, and financial technology (fintech). The industries selected were those that had instituted hybrid work policies following the COVID-19 pandemic, and also relied heavily on the coordination of teams. The officially announced hybrid policies in each organization determined the weekly number of days that employees would work from home and in the office. The formal hybrid policies in each organisation outlined the number of days that were to be off-site and onsite.

Quantitative sample

There were 318 employees surveyed. The criteria were (a) hybrid work arrangements (at least one day at home and at least one day in the office per week) and (b) a supervisor and/or manager. Of those taking part, 54% were female, 45% were male and 1% were non-binary or undisclosed. The age had a mean of 34.2 years with SD of 7.6 and the mean organizational tenure was 4.7 years (SD = 3.1). The majority of participants had a professional or middle-level managerial position (63%), with the rest having a senior specialist or team head (37%). The overall hybrid intensity was an average of 2.7 (SD = 1.1) remote days per week.

Qualitative sample

The qualitative part involved 18 semi-structured interviews with leaders (10 men and eight women) of the same organizations. The selection was also purposive with regard to two aspects: (1) direct responsibility in the management of hybrid teams, and (2) at least six months of experience in leading a hybrid team. The participants were representing different functional areas such as human resources, operations, software engineering and marketing. We spoke to participants over Zoom and interviewed them individually for 45-70 minutes.

Data Collection Procedures

Data for the numerical data has been collected using a web-based data collection survey program (Qualtrics). Invitation letters were issued by organizational HR departments and contained a consent letter stating anonymity and voluntary participation. The questionnaire was administered for six weeks, from January to March 2024. Seven hundred eighty percent of the respondents (78%) responded and 342 were considered valid with 318 considered eligible and included in the analysis (i. e., partially remote workers). The qualitative data were gathered at the same time. Participants were interviewed and the transcripts were recorded and transcribed literally. The following questions were taken to create a semi-structured interview guide: (a) How leaders organized hybrid rhythms, (b) How leaders maintained team identity, (c) How leaders communicated expectations, and (d) How leaders were fair. The data collection was completed by thematic saturation i.e., when no additional conceptual themes were added (Guest et al., 2020).

Measures

All constructs were measured using established or adapted scales, with 5-point Likert-type response options ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Table 1 summarizes the instruments, sample items, and reliability indices.

Table 1. Measurement Scales and Reliability

Construct	Source	No. of Items	Sample Item	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Identity leadership	Shi (2024)	6	"My leader emphasizes what makes our team unique."	.90	.92	.65

Rhythm-Setting	Adapted (MIT SMR, 2023)	6	"My leader ensures we have consistent overlap days for collaboration."	.85	.88	.60
Communication Clarity	Malhotra et al. (2007)	5	"Information from my leader is clear and timely."	.81	.84	.57
Psychological Safety	Edmondson (1999)	7	"It is safe to take a risk in this team."	.89	.91	.66
Trust	Kloepfer (2025)	6	"I can rely on my leader to act in my best interest."	.87	.89	.63
Work Engagement	Schaufeli et al. (2006)	9	"I am enthusiastic about my job."	.88	.90	.64
Perceived Performance	Koopmans et al. (2014)	4	"I perform better than most colleagues."	.84	.86	.58

All measures demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha > .80$) and composite reliability ($CR > .80$). Convergent validity was supported as all average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded .50. Discriminant validity was confirmed using Fornell–Larcker criteria: the square root of each AVE exceeded inter-construct correlations.

Analytical Strategy

Quantitative Analysis

The analysis of data was based on a multi-step method with the help of SPSS 29 and PROCESS Macro v4.3 (Hayes, 2022).

1. Pre-diagnostics: Data were filtered by missing values, outliers, and normality. The values of skewness and kurtosis were within ± 1.0 , which shows normal distribution.
2. Descriptive statistics and correlations: Pearson correlations, standard deviations and means were calculated to investigate interrelations among variables.
3. Regression and mediation testing: H1 (predictive effects of the leadership behaviors on the engagement and performance) was tested through hierarchical regression analysis. H2 mediation analysis was based on the 5000 bootstrap samples of the PROCESS Model 4, which was used to estimate the indirect effects of psychological safety.
4. Moderation testing: PROCESS Model 1 was used to test H3 (moderating role of trust). The plotting of simple slopes was done to derive the conditional impacts of trust on the perceptions of fairness at different levels of remote intensity.
5. Control variables: Age, gender, tenure and remote days per week were inputted as control variables. No multicollinearity problem was present with the variance inflation factors ($VIF < 2.5$).

The effect of common method bias was counterbalanced procedurally with anonymity and item counterbalancing, and statistically with Harman single-factor test (the first factor accounted 27.8% of the variance, which is under the 40% counterbalance).

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data (Braun, and Clarke, 2006). It was done in six steps: entertaining data, preliminary coding, searching for themes, knowing themes, defining themes and presenting the results in the form of a story. Transcript coded using NVivo 14 software by two researchers independently in order to increase reliability. There was very high inter-coder consistency (Cohen k of .82). Thematic saturation was attained at the 15th interview, the rest of the transcripts verified the stability of patterns. Three themes emerged: predictable rhythms, purposeful work in identity, and how fair/equitable it is compared to measures of constructs tested quantitatively.

Ethical Considerations

All the processes were ethical research in the social sciences. The research subjects gave informed consent to take part and were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. The data were kept in a safe place and could be used only in the research.

Data Integration

The process of integration within the convergent mixed-methods approach was carried out in three phases, which were design, analysis and interpretation. Concurrent quantitative and qualitative data collection was implemented and analyzed separately and then merged. Quantitative patterns and qualitative themes were used to achieve this. For instance, the quantitative results on the predictive power of rhythm-setting were contextualised with the stories of the leaders of the designing anchor days and the rituals. A mixed method presentation was both validating and informative; quantitative data were used to explain the relationships; qualitative data were used to explain their occurrence (Fetters et al., 2013).

The research design provided validity in several ways:

- Construct validity: Utilization of validated scales based on previous studies; pilot testing was done on 32 respondents to ensure that it was clear.
- Internal validity: Mediation and moderation analyses took into consideration indirect and conditional effects, which minimized omitted-variable bias.
- Reliability: Stability of measurement was guaranteed by consistent Cronbachs alpha values and coder agreement.
- External validity: It was due to the fact that different industries and jobs increased the generalizability of knowledge-based fields.
- Triangulation: Triangulation of the method was possible through the mixed method design which increased the confidence in results.

Results and Discussion

This part will provide both quantitative and qualitative results of the research including both the statistical analysis and the thematic interpretation. The aim is to describe the role of leadership behaviors, identity leadership, rhythm-setting, and the clarity of communication in affecting engagement and performance in hybrid teams and the effects of psychological safety and trust on these relationships.

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics.

Table 2 describes the generally high perceptions of effective leadership and engagement throughout the sample in the form of descriptive statistics. The highest rating was obtained on identity leadership ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.68$) and rhythm-setting ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.74$) which indicated that the greatest majority of the respondents rated their leaders to be able to offer both direction and stability. The climate was also relatively positive as the level of psychological safety ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.66$) and trust ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.63$) was relatively high. All the correlations were significant in a positive direction. There was a strong relationship between psychological safety ($r = .57$ and $r = .44$, respectively) and between engagement ($r = .49$ and $r = .44$, respectively) and the other two parts of the ID model, identity leadership and rhythm-setting, respectively. These tendencies are indicative of the fact that interpersonal confidence and motivation are propagated by the leaders who create the consistent structures and express a common sense of purpose.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N = 318)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Identity leadership	4.12	0.68							

2. Rhythm-Setting	3.89	0.74	.52**						
3. Communication Clarity	3.95	0.70	.46**	.41**					
4. Psychological Safety	4.03	0.66	.57**	.44**	.39**				
5. Trust	4.08	0.63	.50**	.40**	.35**	.46**			
6. Engagement	4.18	0.64	.49**	.44**	.33**	.52**	.48**		
7. Performance	4.10	0.59	.43**	.38**	.30**	.40**	.37**	.55**	

Note. $p < .05$; $p < .01$.

Measurement Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity statistics are presented in Table 3. All constructs achieved acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha \geq .81$) and strong composite reliability ($CR \geq .84$). Average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded the .50 threshold, confirming convergent validity. The Fornell–Larcker test showed that the square root of each AVE exceeded inter-construct correlations, supporting discriminant validity.

Table 3. Reliability and Validity Summary

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Identity leadership	.90	.92	.65
Rhythm-Setting	.85	.88	.60
Communication Clarity	.81	.84	.57
Psychological Safety	.89	.91	.66
Trust	.87	.89	.63
Engagement	.88	.90	.64
Performance	.84	.86	.58

These indices indicate that the measurement Model is both reliable and valid, providing a sound basis for hypothesis testing.

Regression Analysis: Predictors of Engagement

Hierarchical regression tested the influence of leadership behaviors on engagement while controlling for age, gender, tenure, and remote days per week (Table 4).

Table 4. Regression Results (Dependent Variable: Engagement)

Predictor	β	SE	t	p
Age	.04	.03	1.21	.23
Gender	.02	.04	0.51	.61
Tenure	.05	.03	1.46	.15
Identity leadership	.34	.05	6.80	<.001

Rhythm-Setting	.21	.05	4.15	<.01
Communication Clarity	.11	.04	2.48	<.05
R² = .41				

Identity leadership had the strongest standardized effect ($\beta = .34, p < .001$), followed by rhythm-setting ($\beta = .21, p < .01$). Communication clarity contributed modestly ($\beta = .11, p < .05$). Collectively, these predictors explained 41 percent of the variance in engagement. This supports H1 and underscores that hybrid leaders who create a strong sense of belonging and a predictable structure drive higher engagement.

Regression Analysis: Predictors of Perceived Performance

A second regression examined how the same predictors affected self-reported performance (Table 6).

Table 6. Regression Results (Dependent Variable: Perceived Performance)

Predictor	β	SE	t	p
Age	.03	.03	0.92	.36
Gender	.01	.04	0.32	.74
Tenure	.06	.03	1.89	.06
Identity leadership	.27	.05	5.51	<.001
Rhythm-Setting	.18	.05	3.92	<.01
Communication Clarity	.09	.04	2.06	<.05
Psychological Safety	.24	.05	4.88	<.001
R² = .37				

Both identity leadership and psychological safety significantly predicted perceived performance, accounting for 37 percent of the variance together. The inclusion of psychological safety improved Model fit by seven percentage points, highlighting its mediating importance.

Mediation Analysis: Role of Psychological Safety

Bootstrapped mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 4) confirmed that psychological safety partially mediated the relationship between leadership behaviors and engagement (Table 7).

Table 7. Bootstrapped Indirect Effects (Mediator: Psychological Safety)

Path	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect (β)	95% CI (LL–UL)	Mediation Type
Identity leadership → Engagement	.24***	.13***	[.08, .19]	Partial
Rhythm-Setting → Engagement	.15**	.06**	[.03, .10]	Partial
Communication Clarity → Engagement	.07*	.03*	[.01, .06]	Partial

Note. $p < .05$; $p < .01$; $p < .001$.

The strongest indirect effect was observed for identity leadership, indicating that shared purpose enhances engagement by fostering interpersonal safety. This supports Edmondson's (2019) claim that psychological safety

mediates the relationship between supportive leadership and proactive behavior, extending her Model to hybrid contexts.

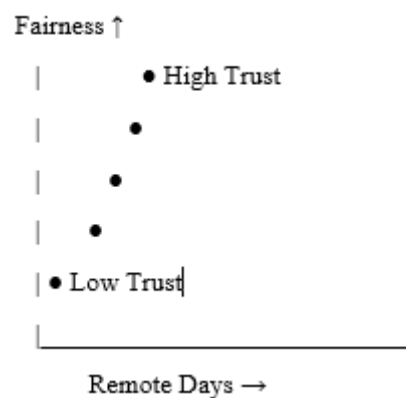
Moderation Analysis: The Buffering Role of Trust

Moderation analysis (PROCESS Model 1) tested whether trust moderated the relationship between remote-work intensity and fairness perceptions. The interaction was significant ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$). Conditional effects are shown in Table 8 and illustrated in Figure 2.

Table 8. Conditional Effects of Remote Days on Perceived Fairness at Different Levels of Trust

Level of Trust	Effect of Remote Days (β)	SE	t	p	95% CI (LL–UL)
Low (–1 SD)	–0.22	0.07	–3.14	.002	[–0.36, –0.08]
Mean	–0.12	0.06	–2.03	.043	[–0.23, –0.01]
High (+1 SD)	–0.04	0.05	–0.81	.419	[–0.14, 0.06]

Figure 2. Moderation Plot of Trust on Remote Days–Fairness Relationship



Fairness perceptions declined as remote days increased, but this effect vanished under high trust. Employees who trusted their leaders did not perceive hybrid flexibility as unfair. This moderating pattern confirms that trust serves as a psychological buffer, mitigating the risks associated with perceived inequity in hybrid arrangements (Kloepfer, 2025).

Integrated Qualitative–Quantitative Findings

The thematic analysis of 18 interviews enriched the statistical patterns, revealing how leaders translate identity, rhythm, and fairness into daily practices. The joint display in Table 9 shows the convergence between quantitative outcomes and qualitative themes.

Table 9. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative Finding	Supporting Interview Evidence	Interpretation
Identity Leadership → Engagement ($\beta = .34$)	"When our leader links our goals to the bigger picture, it motivates us even remotely." – Consulting Manager.	Shared purpose compensates for physical distance and enhances intrinsic motivation.

Rhythm-Setting → Engagement ($\beta = .21$)	"Having fixed in-office days gives the team rhythm, it is like our heartbeat." – IT Team Lead.	Predictable structure reduces coordination strain and reinforces cohesion.
Psychological Safety as Mediator	"Our boss admits mistakes in meetings, which sets the tone that learning is safe." –Marketing Specialist.	Leader openness transforms anxiety into engagement; safety mediates leadership effects.
Trust Moderates Fairness ($\beta = .18$)	"I know my manager values results, not attendance, so working remotely feels fair." – Fintech Analyst.	Trust buffers visibility bias, sustaining equity across locations.
Fairness Practices in Hybrid Teams	"We rotate meeting hosts between office and remote staff." – HR Head	Rotational visibility practices foster inclusion and counteract proximity bias.

The convergence across data types demonstrates that hybrid leadership operates through intentional design choices, temporal structure, shared meaning, and transparent evaluation that reinforce engagement.

Theoretical Interpretation

The results give a logical explanation of the working of hybrid leadership. Structural scaffolds and emotional scaffolds needed in the hybrid engagement are created by identity leadership and rhythm-setting together. Psychological safety can convert these resources to motivation through the interpersonal risk reduction of psychological safety and trust as a contextual stabilizer that helps to hold perceptions of fairness. This multi-layered process fits with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and hence the leadership actions are considered to be job resources to counteract the specificities of hybrid work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The study can also be used in the existing models by adding the e-leadership and identity leadership theories. It replaces hybrid leadership, the architecture as active shaping of rhythms, rituals, and communication systems that sustain belonging and coordination. This idea spans across the entire continuum of transactions and transformations and brings hybrid leadership into the new language of the socio-technological systems.

Practical Implications

The following are some of the lessons that managers can use based on the results:

1. Harmonize foreseeable rhythms. Hybrid success is based on a regular overlap days and meeting procedure that ensures that there is a cohesion in time.
2. Model a sense of identity leadership. Leaders are supposed to develop and convey stories that support who we are both in the virtual and physical environment.
3. Create psychological safety. Acknowledgement of dissent explicitly and the normalization of vulnerability should be used to improve participation in virtual meetings.
4. Build and signal trust. Favouritism is minimized by transparent evaluation systems and performance tracking based on outcomes.
5. Design fairness mechanisms. Recording of deliverables and shift of visibility roles provide equal recognition.

These practices when combined together turn the flexibility of hybrid work into long-term performance, and not fragmentation.

Key Findings

1. Engagement is strongly predicted by identity leadership ($b = .34$) and rhythm-setting ($b = .21$).
2. These effects are partially mediated by psychological safety which proves its central position as a motivational resource.
3. The trust moderates the perceptions of fairness, which neutralize the adverse influences of widespread remote work.

The quantitative Model has been supported by qualitative evidence that demonstrates how leaders can implement these mechanisms using rituals, expected rhythms, and inclusive practices.

Conclusion and Implications

This research endeavored to examine the mechanisms of leadership in hybrid organizations, where staff members, now and then, work in either a physical or a remote workplace. This shift to the hybrid, which has become a key feature of the management of the post-pandemic era, has shifted the idea of leadership from familiar spaces and sightlines. The results of the given research show that successful hybrid leadership is based on two dimensions that are interrelated: structure and meaning. The structure: given to them by rhythm-setting, the conscious development of stable patterns of collaboration, regular communication patterns, and open coordination systems. The meaning is made under identity leadership which means creating a shared meaning, a sense of belonging and a sense of we in the day-to-day life. These are all the dimensions of engagement and performance in a hybrid setting. The findings of the quantitative results showed that identity-based and rhythm-based leadership behaviors significantly estimate engagement and perceptions of performance. The greatest influence was identity leadership, then rhythm-setting after which there was clarity in communication. Psychological safety was found to be a very important mediating factor, and in part explains the association between these leadership practices and engagement. Predictable, fair and inclusive leaders were more likely to be rated as engaging and interpersonally expressing opinions and taking risks by those employees who identified that their leaders had these qualities. Moreover, the relationship between hybrid intensity and fairness had a moderator of trust, which means that in the work environment with high trust, employees did not think of increased remote work as unfair. The findings suggest that the invisible support for engagement in hybrid teams is psychological safety and trust.

The statistical findings were supported by the qualitative evidence that helped to see how hybrid leadership is practiced. Leaders who developed a system of rhythms and rituals, anchor days, inclusive hybrid meetings, and moments for recognition stayed cohesive despite getting physically dispersed, according to leader interviews. Another aspect the leaders resorted to was the intentional identity work when they repeated shared values and came up with traditions that were friendly to hybrid members, uniting them regardless of their dispossession. The terms that were used frequently were equity, leaders spoke about replacing meeting leaders and ensuring that the work of people working remotely was recognised. As these tales demonstrate, hybrid leadership is not serendipitous but a well-thought-out approach. It isn't really about surveillance, it's about co-ordinating, creating the circumstances where flexibility can be compatible with connection. In theory, it is possible to say that this study can add to the modern leadership research in three aspects. First, it uses the Job Demands-Resources theory to the hybrid context by including the leadership behaviors as a job resource that diminishes the specific demands of hybrid work, such as those of coordination complexity and social isolation. Second, it adds value to the theory of identity leadership by illustrating how shared identity can be created and sustained with the help of symbolic and structural practices despite the limitation of physical presence. Third, it clarifies the importance of a combination of trust and psychological safety as the psychological processes that enable hybrid leadership to be successful. This is because it transcends structural and relational perspectives to show that leadership in hybrid spaces is achieved in the same way that it is achieved in systems design.

There are also practical implications of this study. Hybrid Leaders need to be role models as builders of rhythm and culture. Creating foreseeable schedules and routines will assist the employees cope with uncertainty and coordinate their efforts, whereas maintaining shared identity will make sure that physical distance will not destroy a sense of belonging. It is essential that psychological safety can be established by means of inclusive conversation and vulnerability modeling to continue the engagement process and learning. Finally, establishing trust can be done through transparency and fairness to prevent the erosion of hybrid working to an inequality perception. The findings suggest that hybrid leadership is only going to be successful because of human design, not technology. Flexibility devoid of fragmentation is achieved through leaders who are aware of how to organize the communication, solve expectations and celebrate the purpose of the whole.

In spite of such contributions, the study is limited in various ways. Cross-sectional research design does not allow for temporal causality – though the relationships between variables are high, there is no temporal causality that

can be completely achieved. Longitudinal and/or experimental designs could be used in future studies to track the impact of leadership behaviors on engagement and trust across time. Another weakness is the use of self-reported measures of performance; the use of objective performance measures or multisource measures would enhance the results. The sample was furthermore limited to knowledge-intensive organizations in India and the UK, increasing the generalizability to the general cultural or industry environment. This Model should be explored more in production, healthcare and other public sector contexts where the hybrid interaction and hierarchies remain to be explored. An additional area of further research is understanding how new technology is affecting hybrid leadership. The increasing role of AI and digital monitoring in the way collaboration works will require a study of the impact on the work of algorithms and on human trust and autonomy. There is a need to delve deeper into the ethics of data visibility, surveillance of the employees and equity in the digitally mediated space. Furthermore, the team-level analysis and the organizational variables would be able to be analyzed cross-level to uncover the interactions among the leadership behaviors and broader policy context and culture.

In conclusion, this paper argues that leadership in a hybrid organization may be defined as the digital continuation of traditional management, rather than a new management approach. Hybrid leadership can rely upon active social and structural design and strategies that foster engagement, trust and equity. These leaders who can orchestrate anticipated rhythms, build identity and establish sound systems of equity are the ones who can foster lasting motivation and capability at the distributed organization. There are two foundations of this success – psychological safety, and trust, and both drive the long-term engagement that the leader is able to achieve. Last, the research finds that the successful hybrid leader has the structure and empathy, which it becomes clear is only possible when it is underpinned by the clarity, connection, and trust. When approached as a system of engagement, instead of the task management, hybrid leadership provides a way to the more humane and resilient organizations. Leaders can ensure that hybrid working is a strategic opportunity by setting the rhythm of hybrid working, building the hybrid culture, and ensuring it is fair. However, in doing so they would have demonstrated a different form of leadership from the one that would lead to fragmentation and autonomy; a leadership that would allow flexibility and not fragmentation and the one that would allow flexibility and not autonomy. In doing so they would have brought out a different leadership from the one that would have led them to fragmentation and autonomy; from the one that would have led them to autonomy and not to belonging; from the one that would have led them to belonging and autonomy; from the one that would have led them to autonomy and belonging.

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