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Remote Control

Redefining Leadership in the Age of Hybrid Work

Master Thesis, Graduate School

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Abstract

The pandemic, rather than strategy, has led to organizations' most apparent digital transformation in the last years due to unprecedented changes in the business environment and society (De Smet et al., 2021; McKinsey, 2020). This post-pandemic shift to hybrid work has required adjustments from companies, managers, and employees to adapt to a new normal where the workplace, in many cases, is digital (Larson & Dechurch, 2020). However, there are still challenges in adapting to this new way of working, such as inequality and disparities in the teams and challenges with leadership, team cohesion and communication. (Larson & Dechurch, 2020; McKinsey, 2020; McKinsey, 2022) Leadership is one of the keys to organizational success and is emphasized as one of the most critical aspects of successful remote work (Offstein et al., 2010; Gross, 2018). Previous research about leadership styles has defined transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles to have different influences in on-site work settings (Bass & Avolio, 1994). However, there is a current gap in the literature on leadership styles and their influence on successful hybrid teams (DeRosa et al., 2004; Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Therefore, this master's thesis has studied leadership styles in hybrid settings and built a theoretical framework for understanding key leadership styles for managing hybrid teams in different contexts. Eight semi-structured interviews with hybrid team leaders were conducted to examine the challenges and opportunities of hybrid work and the connections between leadership styles and perceived hybrid work success.

The findings of the study suggest that although most employees like the flexibility and potential of working in hybrid settings, it is crucial for leaders and organizations to be supportive and adaptable to the individual needs of the employees to combat any challenges and to utilize opportunities fully. A mix of the transformational, transactional, and Laissez-faire leadership styles appeared to be the optimum, with the transformational skills emphasized as the most important for successfully leading a hybrid team. The study concluded the importance of leaders acknowledging the opportunities and challenges of leading hybrid teams in their particular context and having an adaptable and flexible approach to modify and develop their leadership styles to lead hybrid teams successfully. Lastly, the study found a neglected perspective of leaders in the hybrid work setting, where although the general view of hybrid work was positive, some respondents experienced hybrid work as more time-consuming, pressuring, and challenging than on-site work in their role as hybrid leaders.

Keywords: *Hybrid work, Hybrid teams, Leadership, Hybrid leadership, Remote leadership, Transformational leadership*

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1. Introduction

The Introductory chapter introduces the thesis topic, identifying the problem statement and the purpose of the study. Lastly, the two research questions and the reasoning behind them are presented, and lastly, the delimitations of the study are discussed.

1.1 Background

The pandemic, rather than strategy, has led to organizations' most apparent digital transformation in recent years due to unprecedented changes in the business environment and society (De Smet et al., 2021; McKinsey, 2020). The restrictions of the pandemic accelerated the shift to digital workplaces and hybrid work, i.e., work situations where employees practice a mix of virtual and on-site work in different compositions (McKinsey, 2022). Many organizations have continued to practice hybrid forms of work in the wake of the pandemic, and these new work settings are expected to persist. This is explained due to the removal of technological and cultural barriers and the development of practices to facilitate them, setting in motion a structural shift in how organizations work (McKinsey, 2020). Hybrid work forms can bring a better work-life balance, more flexibility and an employee experience that is more tailored and could positively impact matters such as equity, inclusion efforts, diversity and organizational performance (Gross, 2018; McKinsey, 2022; Purvanova & Kenda, 2018; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2010). According to McKinsey (2020), approximately 20 percent of workers could work 3-5 days a week remotely while keeping their efficiency compared to working in a traditional office setting. A continued and accelerated shift to hybrid work would profoundly impact society, the economy, and organizations. However, there are still challenges in adapting to this new way of working, such as inequality and disparities in the teams and challenges with leadership, team cohesion and communication. (Larson & Dechurch, 2020; McKinsey, 2020; McKinsey, 2022)

This post-pandemic shift and general acceptance of hybrid work have required adjustments from companies, managers, and employees to adapt to a new normal where the workplace, in many cases, is digital (Larson & Dechurch, 2020). More recent research emphasizes how the management of hybrid teams requires a shift in the traditional leadership practices of yesterday due to complex challenges with trust, communication, and disparities in the treatment of the employees (Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023). Hence, it is reasonable to believe that this shift requires further research and adaptation of new best practices for organizations and leaders. Leadership is one of the keys to organizational success and is emphasized as the most important aspect of successful hybrid work (Offstein et al., 2010; Gross, 2018). However, there is a current gap in the literature on leadership styles and their influence on the effectiveness of hybrid teams (DeRosa et al., 2004; Bell & Kozlowski, 2002;

Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Previous research about leadership styles has defined transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles as having different influences on effectiveness in normal work settings (Bass & Avolio, 1994). As an example, the physical distance associated with hybrid work can have a negative impact on leadership, for example as a result of employees tend to perceive the leader as less active and less likely to give rewards and recognition to their employees when leadership takes place in a hybrid setting (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). When the context changes, leadership must adapt to meet the changing conditions (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Gross, 2018; Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Gross (2018) suggests that:

”Connecting the links Between Leadership Styles and Virtual Team Effectiveness can result in virtual esprit de corps, which has been ignored in the literature.” (Gross, 2018, p.1).

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into how leadership styles affect the effectiveness of hybrid teams from the perspective of the leaders. Thus, this qualitative study investigates and analyzes hybrid leadership based on managers’ perceptions. In addition, it proposes a conceptual framework for leadership styles in conjunction with successful leadership during hybrid work constellations.

1.2 Problem statement

Hybrid teams are a growing phenomenon globally, and organizations need to adopt hybrid settings to adhere to employees’ needs for flexibility and work-life balance, maximize productivity, and lower organizational costs (Vial, 2019). The failure to effectively implement transformation, such as an adaptation to hybrid settings, can have significant consequences, including lost revenue, decreased market share, and reduced competitiveness (Riedl et al., 2017; Vial, 2019). Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to understand and manage the challenges with trust, communication, and disparities in the treatment of the employees (McKinsey, 2022; Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023). Hence, an obvious need is understanding effective leadership practices for leading hybrid teams.

Golden (2009) argues that opportunities for hybrid work have developed rapidly due to technological developments and that this also means that it is likely that a change in leadership is required to respond to the need that arises when working no longer takes place at the office facilities. The importance of leadership styles for a company’s success is thoroughly established in organizational research (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Furthermore, research suggests that leadership styles could influence the effectiveness of remote teams (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Due to global expectations of continuous hybrid work, leadership practice in a hybrid work setting is challenging for today’s and future leaders and organizations (McKinsey, 2020). Organizations and the leaders within will have to learn how to adjust practices and reinvent many policies and processes to capture any possible efficiency gains from

working in a hybrid setting. (McKinsey, 2020) However, that research on hybrid work is limited, such as whether and how leaders' management behavior affects employees during hybrid work settings. Furthermore, there is a current gap in the literature on leadership styles and their influence on and leadership of hybrid teams (DeRosa et al., 2004; Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Dahlström (2013); Ziek & Smulowitz, 2012). An aspect that largely characterizes the context of previous similar studies on hybrid work in the context of leadership was an ongoing pandemic and, thus, a situation that forced hybrid work and hybrid leadership. During these periods when hybrid leadership was studied, strict restrictions on social interaction affected society in general. Thus, there is limited research on the ongoing voluntary hybrid work situation when life outside work is back to normal, or at least a new normal. In addition, previous studies have lacked the focus on leadership style in voluntary hybrid settings.

With these implications, there is an apparent research gap in the area of leadership styles in hybrid settings, and therefore of great interest to research the leadership styles that are essential for managing hybrid teams and to gain a deeper understanding of how leaders and organizations can integrate these leadership practices into their strategies. To address this knowledge gap, this thesis examines the role of leadership styles through the theory of transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles by Bass and Avolio (1994) and its connection to leading hybrid teams effectively.

1.3 Purpose & Research Questions

This thesis aims to explore the role of leadership styles theorized by Bass and Avolio (1994) in connection to leading hybrid work teams. Consequently, this thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of the critical role that leaders play in hybrid work settings and provide practical insights that can help leaders and organizations as a whole to navigate this new context of work. The expected outcome of this thesis is to provide valuable insights for leaders, organizations, and researchers in the field of leadership and hybrid work. This outcome will generate a common understanding of best practices and important tools for leading hybrid teams in adapting to the new normal for many organizations. Furthermore, it contributes to the research on tackling common challenges with hybrid work, such as communication, culture, and possible disparities and inequalities between employees. This study outlines a conceptual framework for leadership styles in conjunction with a hybrid team of employees. By providing these insights, this thesis aims to contribute to developing effective strategies for hybrid work, enabling businesses to stay competitive, innovative, and resilient in a rapidly changing environment (Riedl et al., 2017; Vial, 2019). Furthermore, it could aid organizations to become more successful, employees have higher job satisfaction, and lastly, give leaders the tools to become more efficient and appreciated leaders, from top to bottom. Furthermore, This thesis and the

conceptualization and development of the theoretical framework can contribute to leaders, organizational theory, the strategy of organizations, and policymakers involved in hybrid or remote work settings. To achieve the purpose of this study, two research questions were conducted related to leadership in hybrid working conditions:

R1: What are the challenges and opportunities associated with leading hybrid teams?

R2: How can leaders adapt their leadership style to lead hybrid teams successfully?

The first research question explores the challenges and opportunities of leading hybrid teams. It aims to understand the unique characteristics that hybrid leadership brings regarding factors such as productivity, communication, collaboration and team dynamics. The second research question aims to investigate and understand strategies and adaptations that can be made by leaders in hybrid teams, to be efficient in their leadership. This is done by examining theories about leadership styles in conjunction with the challenges and opportunities identified in R1, where the purpose is to identify apparent recommendations and best practices for leaders in hybrid teams. By addressing the research questions, this thesis provides a comprehensive understanding of the connection between leadership styles and the perceived success of hybrid teams.

1.4 Delimitations

This qualitative case study aims to analyze the shift to hybrid work, its challenges and opportunities, and to understand what leadership styles are effective in a hybrid setting. The study was delimited to focus on the leadership perspective of their leadership style and perceived success of their team and how their role as leaders has been challenged and adapted due to hybrid work. Particularly, this research study had the following sub-objectives; 1. To comprehensively review the hybrid work settings of the organizations and the practiced leadership in these hybrid teams, 2. To develop a theoretical framework for visualizing effective leadership styles practiced in perceived successful hybrid teams based on the team context.

The gathering of data was delimited to interviewees of leadership positions who have experience from the same leadership role during traditional on-site work, as well as continued during forced remote work during the pandemic and by the organization's voluntary continuation of the hybrid work practice. This required the interviewees to have held leadership positions for the same team before, during, and after the pandemic and ensured they had a decent time of leadership experience. To capture the full range of challenges and opportunities associated with leadership in hybrid work settings, the organizations in the study are of various sizes, such as small, medium and large enterprises. This

ensured that the study had a more comprehensive and generalizable understanding; however, it could affect the comparability of cases. Lastly, the study was delimited to Swedish organizations, and hence there is a lack of cultural and geographical diversity in the research.

1.5 Disposition of study

The thesis consists of six chapters: *Introduction*, *Literature review*, *Methodology*, *Empirical Findings*, *Data Analysis*, and lastly, *Conclusions*.

The *Introductory* chapter aims to introduce the thesis topic, identifying the problem statement and the purpose of the study. Lastly, the two research questions and the reasoning behind them are presented, and lastly, the delimitations of the study are discussed.

The *Literature review* chapter provides a deeper understanding of the topic and a theoretical background for analyzing the empirical data. Previous research on hybrid work, leadership, and leadership styles is presented, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of the topic, establish previous links between leadership style and hybrid work, and serve as a theoretical background for the discussion. Furthermore, ‘The Full Range Leadership Model’ and ‘Leadership Styles Links with Virtual Team Effectiveness Dimensions’ are presented. Finally, the theoretical framework used to design the interview guide and analyze the collected data is introduced and created based on the previously presented theories and models.

The *Methodology* chapter describes the process of research for the thesis. The chapter begins with a presentation and justification of the research strategy and the qualitative method based on the case study method by Eisenheart (1989). Furthermore, the chapter describes and motivates the sampling process and the study's data collection. It continues by presenting the process of sampling, semi-structured interviews, literature review, and interview guide and describes the process of qualitative thematic analysis. Lastly, ethical considerations are presented, and a discussion of the quality of the study through a criticism of the study, method and literature.

The *Empirical Findings* chapter presents the data collected from the eight interviews with leaders of hybrid teams. The data is synthesized and handled through thematic coding, presented in Figure 4, Identified themes and codes. The chapter presents the empirical findings in the same order as the literature review, first addressing Hybrid Work Settings, secondly Leadership in Hybrid Work Settings, and lastly, Leadership styles in hybrid settings. The chapter ends with tables summarizing the results from the interviews visually in tables and figures, comparing the Described important Leadership Styles with the Actual practiced Leadership Styles based on The Full Range Leadership Model.

Furthermore, the figure of identified Themes & Codes is updated and merged with The Full Range Leadership Model to facilitate the understanding of the empirical result from a theoretical lens and assist in the data analysis.

The *Data Analysis* chapter analyzes the empirical findings based on the literature review and the theoretical framework presented in the second chapter. The analysis starts by presenting the limitations of the study. Furthermore, the chapter follows the same structure as the chapter ‘Empirical Findings’, beginning with an analysis of the hybrid work setting, followed by an analysis of the findings of leadership and leadership styles in hybrid settings. Lastly, the analysis is summarized to provide needed insights for the conclusion of the thesis.

Lastly, the *Conclusions* chapter highlights the study’s essential findings by answering the two research questions. Moreover, the contributions and implications of the study are presented, and finally, recommendations for future research are discussed.

2. Literature Review

The Literature review chapter provides a deeper understanding of the topic and a theoretical background for analyzing the empirical data. Previous research on hybrid work, leadership, and leadership styles is presented, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of the topic, establish previous links between leadership style and hybrid work, and serve as a theoretical background for the discussion. Furthermore, the two models, 'The Full Range Leadership Model' and 'Leadership Styles Links with Virtual Team Effectiveness Dimensions.' Finally, the theoretical framework used to design the interview guide and analyze the collected data is introduced and created based on the previously presented theories and models.

2.1 Hybrid Work Settings

Due to the technological shift forced by the pandemic restrictions worldwide, companies were forced to transition to hybrid work without much opportunity for preparation. This shift to hybrid work, and hence shift to hybrid leadership, has altered companies' social and environmental conditions for companies (McKinsey, 2020). Recent research suggests that hybrid work will persist, and this new normal will change how we perceive leaders and leadership (De Smet et al., 2021; McKinsey, 2020; McKinsey, 2022). McKinsey (2022) defines *hybrid work* as a mix of virtual and on-site work in different compositions. They further state that hybrid work forms can bring a better work-life balance, flexibility and a more individually tailored employee experience. Moreover, it can positively impact equity, inclusion efforts, diversity and organizational performance. Furthermore, organizations can reduce expenses, improve organizational performance, and make the most of talent wherever it may be located by practicing a hybrid model (McKinsey, 2021). This aligns with the theories of Chávarro (2023), who suggests that newer data in the U.S. shows savings of up to \$10,600 per employee by offering remote work. However, increasing costs of compliance and regulatory frameworks caused by remote work could cause a reversion of the shift where instead, more workers are brought back to the on-site office settings (Chávarro, 2023).

According to a recent study by McKinsey (2021), more than half of both government and corporate employees in the U.S. said that they would like to work from home at least three days a week and that they desire more flexible hybrid working arrangements to alternate between on-site work and remote work. Furthermore, more than a fifth of employees in the same study said they would think about changing jobs if their company returned to exclusively on-site work. Remote or hybrid work is reported

to have positive effects such as freed time for a richer social life, less time spent commuting and more flexibility (McKinsey, 2020). Furthermore, many organizations reported productivity increases during the pandemic due to remote work. However, it was further emphasized that these productivity increases could have an unsustainable disadvantage associated with higher rates of reported symptoms of burnout among employees (McKinsey, 2021).

Even though the shift to hybrid work has brought many advantages and benefits to both employees and organizations, it is important to consider the possible challenges that it brings, such as the challenge of leading hybrid teams, balancing equality of opportunities between employees, the well-being of employees, management of goals and work-life balance (De Smet et al., 2021). Although hybrid settings work well for many organizations, they can create challenges regarding communication, culture, and possible disparities and inequalities between employees (McKinsey, 2020; McKinsey, 2022). Larson and Dechurch (2020) suggest that the reduction of spontaneous contact due to hybrid work impairs individuals' social context and furthermore, how social isolation can negatively affect employee well-being. Moreover, hybrid work can increase the risk of communication problems and misunderstandings due to how digital communication risks creating a sense of uncertainty and difficulty for the recipient to understand the content of the message and assimilate the information (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012; Larson & Dechurch, 2020). These limitations in terms of communication can further affect the effectiveness and outcome of decision-making in organizations (Erskine, 2012). Reduced ability to read situations results in a weaker basis for decision-making, which means that leaders are either likely to make poorer decisions or spend more time getting an equivalent level of information than on-site (Erskine, 2012). Furthermore, the workplace shift from an office designed for work to a home adapted for private life also creates challenges for private life and the work-life balance (Larson & Dechurch, 2020). The home consists of different distractions compared to the office, some of which are difficult to eliminate, such as a poorer work environment and distracting family members. These challenges are important for the organization and the leader to manage, provide the employees with good opportunities to work, and create structure (Larson & Dechurch, 2020). In summary, the hybrid work alternative seems to be here to stay due to its many advantages and benefits. However, leaders and organizations must understand and adhere to its challenges.

2.2 Leadership Theory

The leader is often described as the most important factor in successful organizations, but leadership as a concept is complex, controversial, and multifaceted, with several different accepted definitions (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2010). Leadership has developed from traditionally being strongly and solely associated with power and authority to a growing emphasis on the dynamic interplay of relationships and context. This has, in turn, led to the general view that important leadership qualities

further developed from mainly quantitative aspects of management, control and effectiveness also to include softer, qualitative aspects, where the leadership is constituted by motivating and providing followers with a satisfying work life, formulating strategies and constantly evaluating efforts to improve the quality of work life and organizational performance (Safty, 2005).

Bass (1990) suggests that the role of leaders is to mediate tasks and member relationships in team environments. In traditional leadership theory, the follower is often viewed as a passive object. A significant proportion of leadership theories define leadership as a process by which a manager gets a subordinate to behave in the desired direction. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2010) further argue that there is a general view of managers as controlling and able to challenge, drive and change. Furthermore, that success is often attributed to the leader and his characteristics and actions. These theories emphasize the leader as a person and how the leader's capacity is crucial to leadership quality and, furthermore, the organization's success. Thus, if the leader is skilled at exercising leadership, the outcome will be achieved satisfactorily and effectively (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2010).

Sveningsson and Alvesson (2010) further suggest that how followers perceive leadership depends on their previous experiences and knowledge. This aligns with the newer research from Bergner et al. (2019), who describe leadership as a circular process, where positive leadership experiences where individuals have been recognized for successful leadership increase their self-confidence and, in turn, their motivation to lead, which creates effective leadership. Furthermore, individuals who perceive themselves to have a leader's personality are often attributed higher leadership potential than the average, which creates a self-fulfilling prophecy where other individuals are more likely to accept them in leadership positions. (Bergner et al., 2019)

In contrast, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2010) further emphasize the importance of followers and the surrounding environment. Leadership arises in interaction between people, and environmental conditions shape and set the conditions for leadership. A prerequisite for leadership to be exercised is that there is someone or some to exercise it on; these came to be called followers (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2010). It is further necessary to consider the follower to understand the leader and leadership as a concept, and furthermore to understand that followers are required, i.e., persons towards whom leadership is exercised, to speak of leaders. Therefore talk about leadership becomes meaningless if the followers are not seen as active players who need to accept the exercise of leadership for it to exist (Northouse, 2004). DuBrin (2007) defines leadership as:

“The ability to inspire confidence and support among the people who are needed to achieve organizational goals” (DuBrin, 2007, p.2).

Bass (1985) presents a more dynamic view of leadership, where he interprets leadership as a dynamic interplay between leaders, their followers, and their organizational environment, emphasizing how change and processes are central to the definition of leadership. Leadership is exercised by transforming followers, creating visions, and formulating a path to achieve common goals. This aligns with the newer organizational theory that emphasizes leadership as an interpersonal relationship in which followers obey because they want to, not because they must (Northouse, 2004). This aligns with the theories of Safty (2005), who emphasize how the role of the followers has changed over time as processes change and social relationships are put into focus. The significance of the role has gone from being defined as a passive object that follows the leader regardless of action to being of significant importance in today's organization's role, to which leadership must be adapted. Thus, if leadership is considered to be influencing others to act in accordance with desirable outcomes or goals, the followers are a factor to consider (Gibson et al., 2002). This further aligns with the theories of Hughes et al. (2006), who discuss how individually tailored leadership can lead to motivated followers, increase morale and improve performance. Thus, leadership includes both a focus on promoting employee health and individual success as well as organizational health and success. Furthermore, this aligns with the theories of Yukl (2006), who further suggests that effective leadership is when the leader provides meaning to events, engages subordinates' commitment to tasks, aligns objectives, and establishes trust between the leader and their followers. Moreover, it makes sense through the lens of Bass and Avolio (1994), who emphasize how the commitment of employees, their loyalty, and involvement together with enlightened leadership is fundamental in the process of organizational improvement long term.

Lastly, it is crucial to consider the full range of leadership, where what is considered to be effective leadership can be discussed in terms of both positive and negative qualities, where the latter are often ignored and theorized as the dark sides of leadership (Itzkovich et al., 2020). It is suggested that leaders must be aware of their possible negative traits, such as supervision, micromanagement, and even narcissism, to prevent these traits and behaviors from negatively impacting individual employees, the team in general, corporate culture, and later organizational performance. Leaders' self-awareness could assist in addressing issues and preventing negative consequences from managing organizations. The importance of organizations and leaders' continued work to recognize negative leadership traits from occurring. (Itzkovich et al., 2020)

2.3 Leadership in Hybrid Work Settings

Leadership is considered one of the keys to organizational success and one of the most critical aspects of successful hybrid work (Offstein et al., 2010; Gross, 2018). Hence, organizations must provide support and conditions for leaders to exercise their leadership and to interpret and respond to its results (Thomas & Cheese, 2005), mainly when drastic changes occur. By being aware of the challenges that

come with hybrid work and beneficially managing them, managers can facilitate the opportunity for engaged and productive employees (Larson & Dechurch, 2020). Working hybrid means that different factors than office work characterize the work, and this is something that managers should keep in mind. Bell and Kozlowski (2002) suggest that the degree of interdependence among the members of a virtual team and the amount of communication and structure required for employee effectiveness change the context in which the leader operates and, therefore, what is required from the leader. They suggest that the importance of how leadership in hybrid or remote teams differs vastly due to the uniqueness of different types of teams, and internally the individual needs to create effective leadership in virtual settings. A team with a high level of communication and interdependence, with employees working jointly toward a shared vision, requires a leader with strong communication and leadership skills to ensure efficient work toward the goal. The same goes for teams formed for a specific project or temporary tasks and further described to need clear goals and expectations by the leader and sufficient support throughout the project or the teams' existence. On the other hand, teams that are characterized as parallel teams, with low levels of communication and interdependence in a team where the work might be dispersed and individual, require feedback and occasional communication but not as much management and coordination as the two above-mentioned (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002).

Kane et al. (2019) suggest that traditional leadership skills should be mixed with new skills to be efficient leaders in the future. The leader's change in leadership can thus be seen as two-dimensional, as the conditions at both ends of the leadership have changed (Erskine, 2012). Thus, leaders should not only self-navigate and adapt their leadership in the new situation of hybrid work but also guide and facilitate employees in the change. Since leadership is relationship-based and thus dependent on contact between leaders and followers, the lack of physical presence and contact in an office is a challenge in several ways (Erskine, 2012). Distance makes it difficult for employees to contact, support and share information with coworkers and managers. Communication must be adapted to be effective in hybrid and in-person settings (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Reeves (2021) further argues that leadership is of utmost importance to create a successful hybrid workplace, requiring the leaders to be adaptable to the new ways and evolving needs of employees and empathetic. Successful hybrid leadership is described as an iterative process that focuses on creating a collaborative culture, building trust, and providing flexibility. Communication, clear expectations, empathy, and further allow employees to work based on their individual needs (Reeves, 2021).

The ideas by Reeves (2021) align with the study by Ziek and Smulowitz (2014), which examined effective leadership in virtual teams, identifying that leadership style, communication, trust, goal setting, and accountability were important to achieve effective remote leadership. This is strengthened by the results of an experimental study on a virtual by DeRosa et al. (2004), who manipulated the variables of leadership and trust to determine the significance of those variables on team performance,

resulting in the conclusion that teams with high levels of leadership and trust performed better than their peers receiving low levels in the experiment. Furthermore, trust was found to be a mediator between the performance of the team and the leadership, implying that higher levels of trust facilitated the leadership into improved performance and overcoming challenges of hybrid work. (DeRosa et al., 2004)

Hoch and Kozlowski (2014) suggest that leading remote teams can be classified through a three-level approach: 'Hierarchical Leadership,' 'Structural support,' and 'Shared team leadership.' Hierarchical leadership describes the formal leader within a remote team, such as the manager. The role of this leader in a virtual setting is to provide clear feedback and communication, provide guidance, and understand and adapt to the challenges of hybrid work. Furthermore, the importance of the 'Structural support' provided by the organization is emphasized. Structural support is the resources that organizations need to provide their employees to create an efficient and effective work environment, such as policies and technology and adaptation of new procedures for hybrid work. Lastly, with 'Shared team leadership,' Hoch and Kozlowski (2014) describe the importance of the distribution of responsibility among the team members to facilitate engagement and commitment to common goals, where the culture of the team provides possibilities for collaboration, participation, and skill development of the team members.

2.3.1 Relationships

It is of utmost importance for leaders to recognize the role of relationships and relational skills in hybrid settings, where hierarchical positions become less visible (Soga et al., 2022). Hybrid working conditions affect not only the relationship between manager and employee but also the relationship between all colleagues in the team (Schwarz Müller et al., 2018). In addition to constantly promoting and coaching employee relationships, managers should strive to improve the relationships among the team members and the sense of group affiliation. This promotes well-being and good working conditions and maintains the team's collaboration and effective work (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012). In addition, the manager has an important role as a representative and guide in a disruptive situation that hybrid work can be classified as, as employees tend to seek reassurance in the manager's behavior (Larson & Dechurch, 2020). Thus, showing security and positivity regardless of the situation could be important characteristics of the leader (Larson & Dechurch, 2020). The leader does not only influence through active leadership but consequently also has an important role as a role model. Thus, the leader should strive to set a good example and act and behave according to how he or she wants the employees to be and do (Schwarz Müller et al., 2018). Furthermore, to improve hybrid leadership, McKinsey (2021) suggests that leaders must adopt new behaviors to make up for the diminished socioemotional cues in digital channels. Furthermore, they suggest that leaders map and track informal

networks that overlap and intersect inside the team, keeping track of how relationships evolve to help to sustain social cohesiveness. (McKinsey, 2021)

2.3.2 Communication

Meetings and other activities should be regularly scheduled to meet social needs, such as time for non-work-related socializing. Furthermore, the leader needs to ensure that employees are guaranteed time for questions, support, information, and feedback (Erskine, 2012; Larson & Dechurch, 2020). Moreover, it is important to provide opportunities for personal development by offering courses and workshops for the employees to strengthen communication and corporate culture, as well as providing technology that supports connections and communication to maintain team cohesion. For example, requiring contact via video conferencing makes communication more nuanced and is beneficial in mimicking the situation in the office (Erskine, 2012).

2.3.3 Trust

Managers and employees with previous experience working together on-site in the workplace provide an advantageous basis for remote leadership. Due to the existence of a certain amount of trust and experience in the group, the sense of trust and understanding of both leader and each other is enhanced (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012), which aligns with the theories of Sveningsson and Alvesson (2010) suggesting that how followers perceive leadership depends on their previous experiences and knowledge. Furthermore, the manager is vital in supporting and encouraging the employees and should be sensitive and attentive to individuals' feelings (Erskine, 2012; Alparslan, 2022). Showing trust and delegating responsibility to employees thus increases productivity, which contributes positively to the organization's overall performance. (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012)

2.3.4 Autonomy

Employee autonomy or self-leadership is important to consider when discussing hybrid work. The transformational leadership style should facilitate employee ownership and freedom to choose how to work and to take responsibility thereof (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Successful hybrid leaders adopt a leadership style that operates through an "individualized consideration," operating their leadership individually through what suits each employee the best. In addition to contributing positively to the relationship between leaders and employees, a sense of responsibility and self-leadership can motivate employees and have a positive indirect effect on the employees' performance through psychosocial empowerment. (Erskine, 2012; Alparslan, 2022)

2.3.5 Individualization

Individual adaptations of work policies to fit the individual work-life situations of employees are important to increase productivity and well-being in organizations (Subel et al., 2022). As a consequence of the remote setting, leaders of remote teams should have a more inclusive leadership style with a higher degree of individual focus than on-site leaders (Schwarz Müller et al., 2018). By striving to get employees involved and seeking ideas and feedback from them, a more nuanced and accurate basis for leadership and future decisions is fostered (Schwarz Müller et al., 2018).

2.4 Leadership Styles: Transformational & Transactional Leadership

Both previous and more recent studies of leaders in hybrid work settings suggest that the transformational leadership style is the most successful when companies offer this type of work (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Bass and Avolio (1994) emphasize how the commitment of employees, their loyalty, and involvement together with enlightened leadership is fundamental in the process of organizational improvement long term. They developed a theory of leadership styles that focuses on the relationship between the leader and their followers, known as transformational leadership theory, visualized in The Full Range Leadership Model. According to their research, depending on the circumstance and the demands of their followers, influential leaders, according to The Full Range Leadership Model, combine transactional and transformational leadership in a continuum from passive and ineffective to effective and active leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The passive versus active axis in the model explains the style of leadership. In contrast, the dimension of effectiveness in the model visualizes the impact of leadership style on team performance.

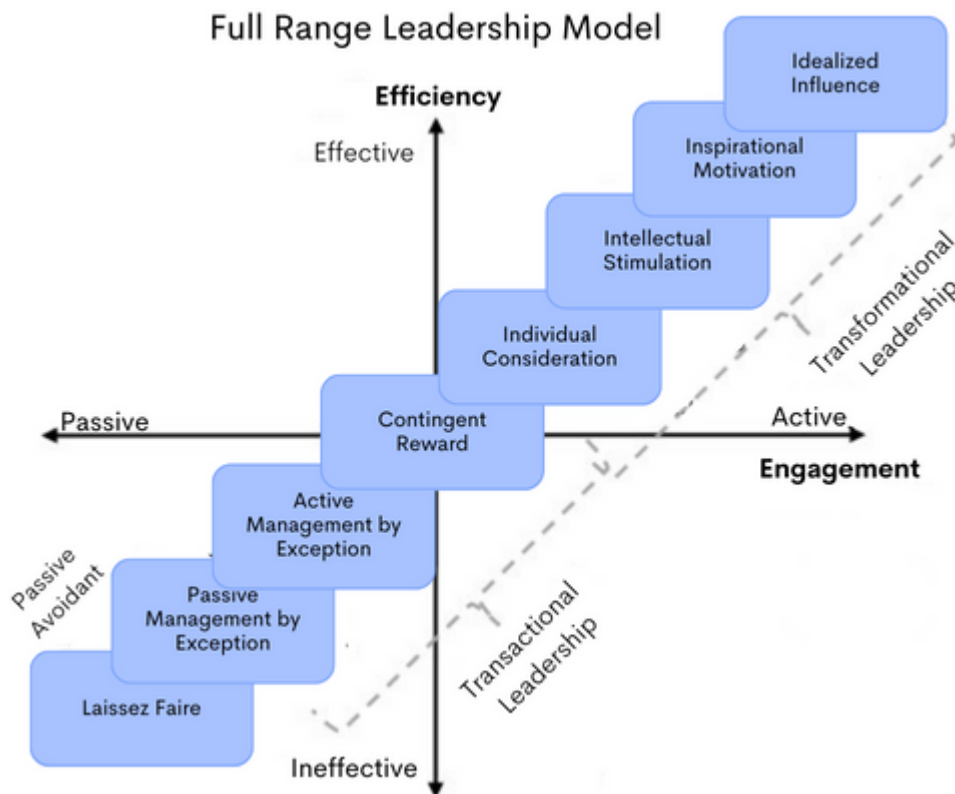


Figure 1. The full range Leadership model. Own visualization based on the framework of Bass & Avolio (1994)

The leadership styles presented range from a passive type of leadership defined as “laissez-faire” to transformational leadership on the opposite end of the continuum, presenting a more active and relational leadership style. The laissez-faire leadership style implies a passive and ineffective leader who lacks the employees’ direction and leadership. Compared to transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership is a non-transaction; the leader is inactive and considered ineffective, according to the model.

Moving further up in the model to transactional leadership style, the effectiveness and engagement increase (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The transactional leadership style is described as a transaction between the leader and the employees, where the performance is answered with either reward or punishment, i.e., a transaction between the leader and his or her followers. Even though transactional leadership is more active than the previous laissez-faire leadership, it still has limitations since it mainly focuses on motivating employees to achieve goals through rewards or punishments. Key behaviors associated with the transactional leadership style are described as passive management by exception, active management by exception, and contingent reward. Passive and Active management by exception originates from leadership that will only practice leadership when issues arise, or the organization

demands it reactively. The leader corrects errors to maintain the company's status quo rather than striving to achieve more and higher goals. The active style is more proactive in their leadership and possibly micromanaging to be able to intervene before any issues arrive. This type of leader can be described as having problem-solving and a hands-on approach as a leader. However, passive and active management by exception focuses on errors and deviations in the organization. The third fundamental behavior associated with the transactional leader is Contingent reward, which describes a leader that practices a result-driven approach focusing on goals and uses rewards, or punishments, to motivate employees to reach targets when they meet or exceed expectations (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The contingent reward is a positive form of reinforcement, and management by exception, passive or active, is described as more negative. Hence, transactional leadership describes a style of leading that either disciplines or rewards the employee, judging by the adequacy of their performance.

Although the transactional type of leadership can be effective and required in certain situations and the proper context, it lacks compared to the transformational leadership style and the four I:s, which is described to be more motivating employees to reach their peak potential. At the top right corner of the model, both efficiency and engagement are described as high, and this is where the transformational leader operates (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Yammarino and Bass (1990, p. 1) describe the transformational leader as:

“...one who articulates a vision of the future that can be shared with peers and subordinates, intellectually stimulates subordinates, and pays great attention to individual differences among people” (Yammarino & Bass, 1990, p. 1)

Transformational leaders are active, and their inspiring and motivating ways contribute to employees that perform beyond what is expected from the organization. As leaders, they are visionaries who, based on relational skills and the individual needs of the employees, create a sense of purpose and aligned values in the teams they lead. They further suggest that leaders with transformational leadership styles demonstrate four main attributes; *inspirational motivation or charismatic leadership, individual consideration, idealized influence, and intellectual stimulation* (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Individual consideration is described as the ability of the leader to provide individualized attention and support, and feedback to the employees, making an effort to understand the individual needs and strengths of the employees and adapting their leadership on an individual level to provide the support and leadership that is needed and wanted through trust and mutual respect. Continuing up the continuum comes *Intellectual stimulation*, which describes how a leader can improve critical thinking and innovative ideas and solutions of followers by encouraging questioning of the norm and creativity and fostering curiosity among followers. Furthermore, the leader encourages the employees to improve

their skills and knowledge. The third key behavior of transformational leaders is called *Inspirational Motivation*, which describes how the leaders, through encouragement, can motivate employees to reach their full potential and to see their unique, important place in the team and offer an attractive vision to do so. The leader creates an inspiring environment where employees are encouraged to work towards their shared vision through clear communication and a work climate that encourages taking risks and going beyond. Lastly, the fourth key behavior is *Idealized Influence*, which requires the leader to be a role model to earn respect and admiration, set an example, and inspire the employees to behave morally and ethically. (Bass & Avolio, 1994)

According to Bass & Avolio (1994), and fundamental to the model presented, all leaders display all leadership styles to some extent. Furthermore, transformational leadership should not substitute transactional due to augmenting effects of transformational on the transactional style, which could lead to goal achievement from the transactional style. However, an optimal profile shows more tendencies to the upper right of the model. This goes in line with the ideas of Yukl (2006):

“Transformational leadership increases follower motivation and performance more than transactional leadership, but effective leaders use a combination of both types of leadership” (Yukl, 2006, p.262).

According to extensive research, it is established that the transformational leadership style produces greater effects than transactional leadership. A transactional leadership style results in expected outcomes, compared to the transactional style that can create team performance that leads organizations to success and beyond expectations (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Northouse, 2004; Yukl, 2006). Sadeghi et al. (2012) strengthen these theories in their study by concluding that individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, contingent reward, laissez-faire, and management-by-exception were all found as significant predictors of leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, previous studies have shown that leaders that operate through a transformational leadership style are effective in hybrid work environments, as it helps foster a sense of trust and engagement among the employees (Gross, 2018; Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Moreover, transformational leaders were both more satisfying as leaders and more effective than their transactional peers, but with an emphasis that these leaders merely practiced more of the effective active style and less of the passive ineffective ones (Gross, 2018; Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Furthermore, leadership training in the key behaviors of transformational leaders has been shown to enhance the above-mentioned satisfaction and effectiveness of the leader (Avolio & Bass, 1994; Avolio & Bass, 2004).

However, the context will decide what leadership is most successful. The transactional leadership style is likely more rigid and less adaptable in the hybrid work setting due to its focus on maintaining the status quo and adhering to established policies and procedures. Thus, this type of leadership could be ineffective in situations of hybrid work since the hybrid setting requires profound changes in the operations of organizations. On the contrary, transactional leadership could be effective when transformational leadership styles complement it in adapting the hybrid setting through inspiration and empowerment of the new way of working. Moreover, there is reason to believe that even the laissez-faire leadership style could work well in some contexts, at least combined with the other styles to some extent.

However, while the above studies provide evidence for the advantages of the transformational leadership style, one must consider how different contexts and organizational settings could require different approaches to leadership. The framework is intended to create understanding and guide through different leadership styles and behaviors associated with leaders to become better leaders for their teams. It is essential to highlight that the Full Range Leadership Model and the theories it is built upon have been criticized in leadership research, where it is said to lack consideration of contextual variables and that the view of leaders and their followers exist in a vacuum rather than a complex reality (Antonakis & Avolio, 2003; Northouse, 2004). Hence, it is of utmost importance to consider contextual influences to understand the process of leadership and leadership styles fully.

2.4.1 Leadership Styles Links with Virtual Team Effectiveness Dimensions

The theory behind The Full Range Leadership Model (Bass & Avolio, 1994) is further researched by Gross (2018), who means that traditional ways of leading teams need to be questioned regarding virtual teams. Gross (2018) further suggests that there is a need to balance the need for structure and control with the need for flexibility and autonomy of the employees. In line with the ideas of transactional and transformational leadership by Bass & Avolio (1994), Gross (2018) proposes a leadership framework for the effectiveness of virtual teams, where the dimensions of task orientation and relationship orientation are presented, in line with “The Full Range Leadership Model.” In the model ‘Leadership Styles Links with Virtual Team Effectiveness Dimensions,’ Gross (2018) explains the complex relationship between the leadership styles described in the ‘The full range Leadership model’ and effectiveness in virtual teams, i.e., teams practicing remote work. Below is a visualization by Gross (2018) of how the different leadership styles work in virtual settings.

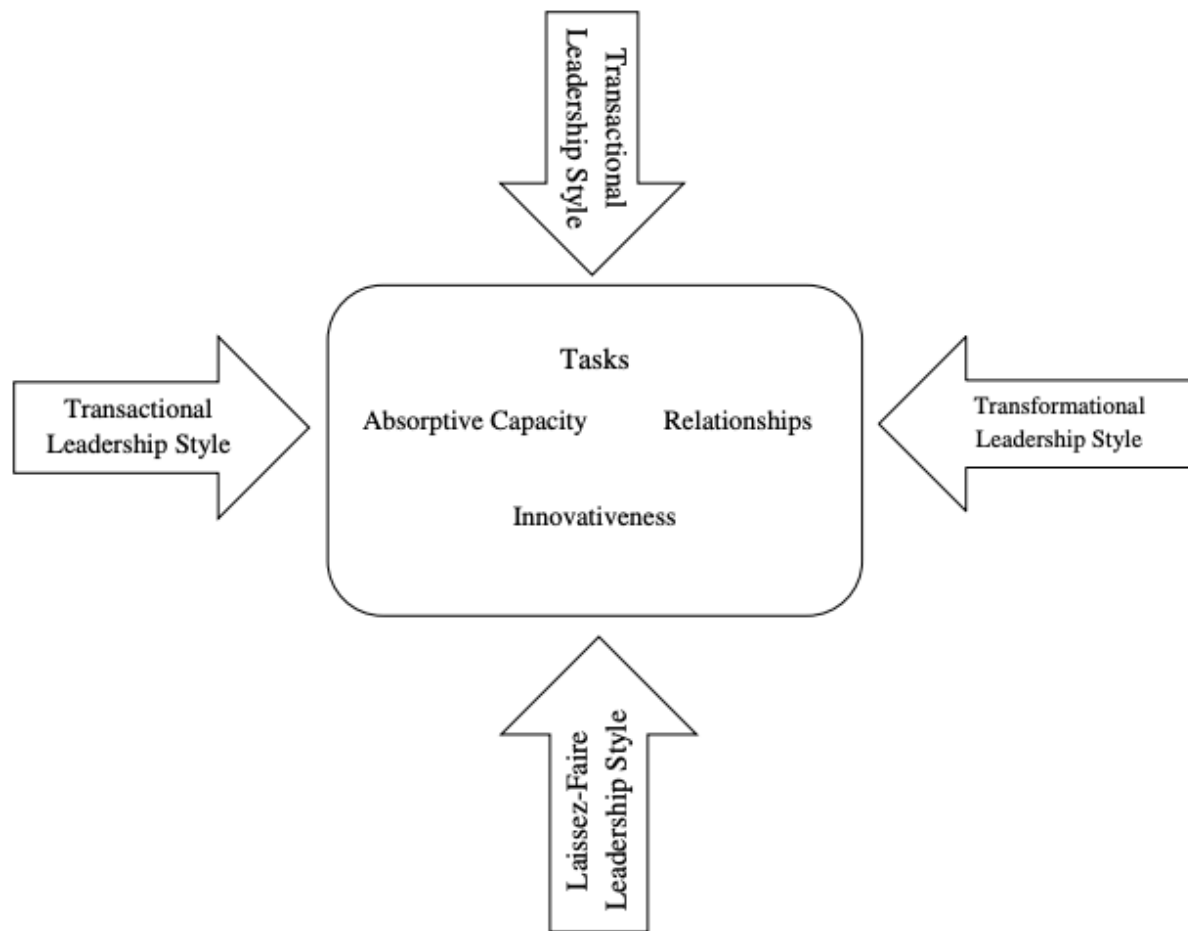


Figure 2. Leadership Styles Links with Virtual Team Effectiveness Dimensions.

The conceptualization of this theory suggests that different leadership styles have different outcomes on the dimensions of virtual team effectiveness. Gross (2018) suggests that leadership styles influence the effectiveness of remote teams operating in a virtual configuration, where the effectiveness has behavioral dimensions, which both determine and influence the leadership styles. According to this model, the ‘*transformational*’ leadership style and the skills and competencies it is associated with are visualized in the model to have the most impact in the dimension called ‘Relationships’ in virtual team effectiveness. The transformational leader is described as focusing on, and succeeding in, maintaining relational matters in virtual teams. Gross (2018) means that a transformational leadership style creates, builds, and sustains solid relationships in remote settings. Gross (2018) means, aligned with the theories from Bass and Avolio (1994), that the transformational style was shown to foster networking

structures, provide vision and goal sharing, and foster intellectual stimulation among teams. Furthermore, transformational leadership is preferable in situations of growth and change and in building engaged, inspired, and motivated teams that want to participate in a shared vision. However, on the negative side, the transformational leadership style requires plenty of time and effort from the leader (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Gross, 2018).

The *'transactional'* leadership style was connected to the dimensions of 'Tasks' and 'Absorptive Capacity' in the model. Gross (2018) further explains how the transactional leadership style influences tasks, task communication, and task completion. According to Gross (2018), the transactional leadership style can therefore be suited for virtual teams requiring structure and order and creating productive results short term due to its strong link between the performance of employees and rewards. However, the transactional style can simultaneously hinder employee motivation and engagement, limit innovative and creative thinking, and negatively impact long-term team performance, which further aligns with the theories from Bass and Avolio (1994). (Gross, 2018).

Lastly, the *'laissez-faire'* leadership style is linked with the dimension 'Innovativeness.' Laissez-faire is by Gross (2018) described as an absence rather than non-leadership in his research. According to Gross (2018), the absence of apparent leadership can provide a setting where the team becomes more innovative in their behavior through the freedom the lack of leadership provides. Furthermore, leader absentia is described as providing entrepreneurial and risk-taking practices among the employees. On this note, Gross (2018) explains that the hands-off leadership style laissez-faire can create effective teams in virtual settings if the team members are proficient and experienced, where creativity and innovative behavior are fostered through working freedom. Disadvantages, however, could be for teams lacking the proficiency and maturity level needed to benefit from laissez-faire, where leadership instead can be perceived as unfavorable and as lacking engagement (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Furthermore, an absent leader can lead to confusion, less motivated and engaged employees, and productivity drops. (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Gross, 2018). However, in line with what is suggested in The Full Range Leadership Model (1994), Gross (2018) suggests that even if elements of transactional and laissez-faire leadership can be necessary to some extent in remote settings to achieve goals and objectives, a transformational leadership style is superior in remote teams, due to its keystones of relations, communication, and trust, which is described as essential for successful leadership in remote teams.

2.5 Leadership Styles in Hybrid Settings

Both previous and more recent studies of leaders in hybrid work settings suggest that the transformational leadership style is the most important when companies offer this form of work (Wiatr

& Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Wiatr and Showron-Mielnik (2023) highlight the importance of the transformational characteristics of leadership, in particular during remote work settings, due to its relational focus, which is described as necessary due to factors such as trust, team building, problem-solving, and knowledge sharing within the teams. They further describe how the coaching and communicative styles of transformational leaders facilitate and coordinate the hybrid workers to be independent yet thrive in the hybrid setting. This aligns with the theories by De Smet et al. (2021) theories, which promote a leadership style that tackles challenges by emphasizing building trust, communicating, and collaborating in their leadership role in remote settings. Furthermore, Puranova & Kenda (2018) suggest, in line with transformational and transactional leadership theories by Bass and Avolio (1994), that leaders should simultaneously operate these types of leadership styles simultaneously to adhere to the special conditions of hybrid work. This is due to employees' need for softer, transformational leadership traits such as fostering motivation and building relationships with individual employees and the team. On the other hand, leaders are often expected to opt into transactional leadership behaviors such as coordinating, planning, and handling processes (Puranova & Kenda, 2018). Furthermore, Gross (2018) argues that innovative and creative work could be more efficient and better executed individually in remote settings with a less hands-on leader to promote freedom, i.e., the possible need for some laissez-faire leadership.

Lastly, McKinsey (2020) suggests that some leadership practices are shown to be more efficiently done in person. These practices include counseling, providing advice and feedback, coaching, onboarding activities, building relationships internally and with customers, critical decision-making, negotiations, training and education, and collaborative and creative activities such as problem-solving and innovative incentives. Hence, hybrid settings offer an opportunity here compared to fully remote settings, where leaders should consider practicing these activities in the office to the extent that it is possible to remain effective (McKinsey, 2020). Concluded much research regarding leadership in virtual, remote, and hybrid settings exists. However, there is still a gap in what leadership styles are perceived as effective in hybrid work settings. Below, a theoretical framework is developed based on the literature review to understand leadership styles in hybrid work through previous knowledge.

2.5.1 Theoretical Framework: Leadership Styles in Hybrid Team Effectiveness

Based on the literature and mainly the previous research from Bass & Avolio (1994) about leadership styles and Gross (2018) about leadership styles in virtual settings, a theoretical framework has been developed to be tested by the empirical data and to support the analysis in this study. The reasoning behind the framework is to conceptualize and synthesize previous research about remote and virtual work, leadership, and leadership styles, to visualize the expected outcomes of different leadership styles in hybrid settings. The idea is that the three leadership styles, 'Transformational,'

‘Transactional,’ and ‘Laissez-Faire,’ can positively and negatively affect hybrid team leadership, depending on the context. Furthermore, ‘Trust’ in the leader and his/her leadership, ‘Proficiency’ in the team, and ‘Maturity’ of the team can all act as mediators of the leadership styles and thereby affect the outcome of the leadership style in the hybrid team effectiveness. The framework is intended as a tool to understand what type of leadership style to adhere to in different contexts of hybrid work.

Leadership Styles in Hybrid Team Effectiveness

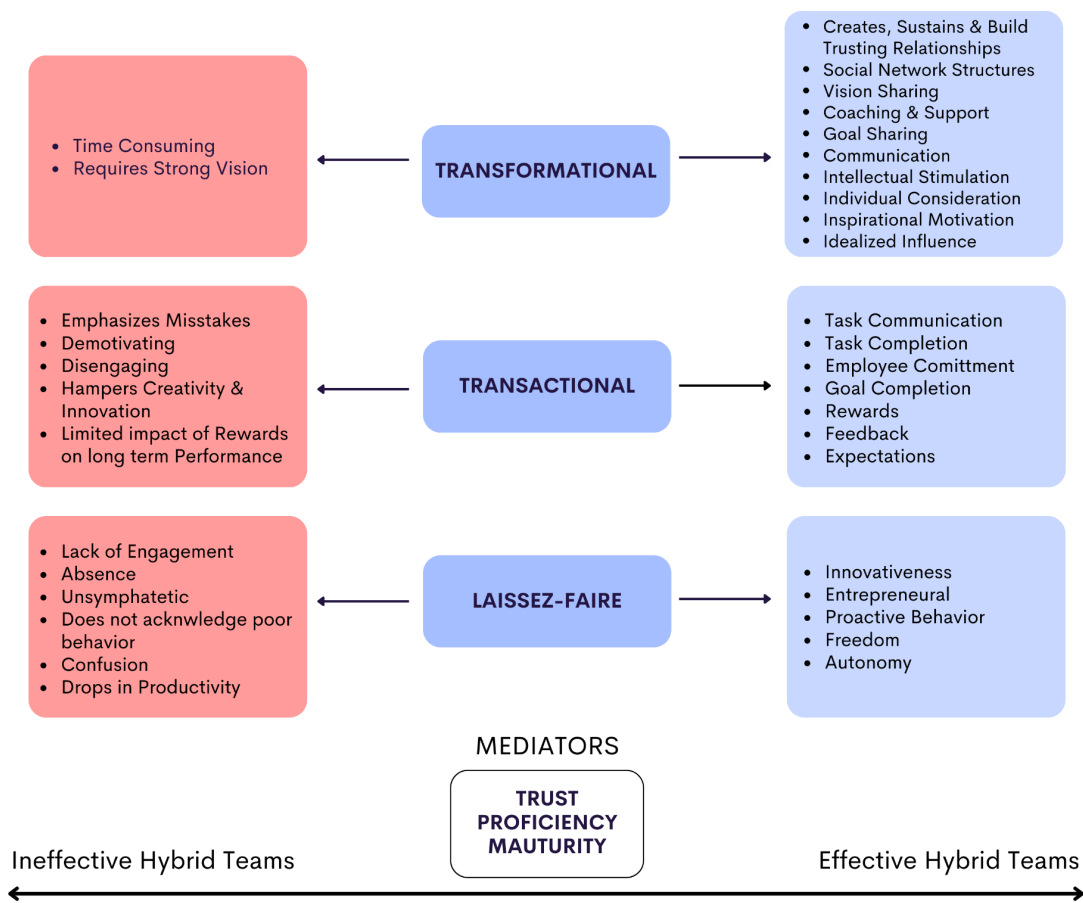


Figure 3. Theoretical Framework: Leadership Styles in Hybrid Team Effectiveness
Based on Bass & Avolio (1994) and Gross (2018).

3. Methodology

The Methodology chapter describes the research process for the thesis. The chapter begins with a presentation and justification of the research strategy and the qualitative method based on the case study method by Eisenheart (1989). Furthermore, the chapter describes and motivates the sampling process and the study's data collection. It continues by presenting the process of sampling, semi-structured interviews, literature review, and interview guide and describes the process of qualitative thematic analysis. Lastly, ethical considerations are presented and furthermore, a discussion of the quality of the study through a criticism of the study, method and literature.

3.1 Research Strategy

To appropriately investigate the research question to explore the role of leadership styles in hybrid settings, the chosen scientific method was a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews with respondents holding leadership positions in companies, according to best practices of building a theory of case study research developed by Eisenheart (1989). This method is further visualized in Table 1, Overview of case study method based on ‘Process of Building Theory from Case Study Research (Eisenhart, 1989). The approach of a qualitative interview study was to create an in-depth, multifaceted research process on the complex topic of the practices associated with leadership styles in the context of hybrid work (Bell et al., 2022; Patel & Davidson, 2019). The research questions were intended to be understood and explained from the respondents’ perspectives in a contextual and nuanced form. Hence, a qualitative study was preferred to a quantitative one. The idea was for the theory and reasoning to emerge through a pragmatist abductive approach by collecting data from interviews and the analysis thereof (Bell et al., 2022). The choice of an abductive approach was due to the limitations in inductive and deductive research approaches in terms of theory-building abilities of empirical data with inductive research as well as the issue of the reliance on a stricter logic behind falsifying hypotheses by theory testing in terms of a deductive approach. To study the chosen type of phenomenon, abduction allows for a puzzling approach to analyze and explain the research questions at hand by an interactive process using empirical research and theoretical ideas simultaneously to reach the “best” explanation and conclusions by cognitive reasoning and interpreting the gathered data. (Bell et al., 2022; Eisenhardt, 1989)

This qualitative study was done through a comparative design. Here, this research method was done by comparing several cases on an organizational level through the data generated from interviews (Bell et al., 2022). Every respondent represented an individual case. This method was suitable for understanding common grounds, differences, and any unclear areas and then analyzing and evaluating

the results. According to Bell et al. (2022), a comparative study design holds the same reliability, validity, and replicability as a cross-sectional design, as it can be described as multiple cross-sectional designs conducted simultaneously on different cases. Furthermore, the choice of a comparative design for this qualitative study was due to how it generates trustworthy and robust development of theories. The research design intended to provide a rich and detailed analysis of the role of leadership styles in hybrid work settings to assist in developing practical insights and recommendations for businesses seeking to implement successful hybrid transformation initiatives.

Steps	Activities	Reasons
1. Getting started	Definition of research questions Possibly a priori constructs Neither theory nor hypotheses	Focuses efforts Provides better grounding of construct measures Retains theoretical flexibility
2. Selecting cases	Specified population Theoretical sampling	Sharpens external validity Focuses efforts on cases that replicate or extend theory
3. Crafting instruments and protocols	Multiple data collection methods Qualitative and quantitative data combined Multiple investigators	Strengthens grounding of theory by triangulation of evidence Synergistic view of evidence Fosters divergent perspectives and strengthens grounding
4. Entering the field	Overall data collection and analysis Flexible and opportunistic data collection methods	Speeds analysis and reveals helpful adjustments to data collection Allows investigators to take advantage of emergent themes and unique case features
5. Analyzing the data	Within-case analysis Cross-case pattern using divergent techniques	Gains familiarity with data and preliminary theory generation Forces investigators to look beyond initial impressions
6. Shaping hypotheses	Replication, not sampling, logic across cases Search evidence of “why” behind relationships	Confirms, extends, and sharpens theory Builds internal validity
7. Enfolding literature	Comparison with conflicting and similar literature	Builds internal validity Sharpens external validity
8. Reaching closure	Theoretical saturation when possible	Ends process when marginal improvement becomes small

Table 1. Overview of case study method based on ‘Process of Building Theory from Case Study Research (Eisenhart, 1989).

3.2 Sampling

The empirical data was collected from eight respondents with leadership positions in organizations providing hybrid work opportunities for their employees due to the pandemic shift in combination with

cultural and digital advancements. At the studied companies, office work with physical presence was the norm prior to the pandemic. However, today they offer a flexible possibility for the employees of hybrid work, a combination of on-site and remote work. The collected material is based on interviews limited to respondents of leadership positions who have experience from the same leadership role during traditional on-site work and continued during forced remote work during the pandemic and by the organization's voluntary continuation of the hybrid work practice. This required the interviewees to have held leadership positions for the same team before, during, and after the pandemic and ensured they had a decent and similar time of leadership experience. Furthermore, to achieve higher comparability among the respondents, they were all required to lead teams of high employee professionalism and team maturity, meaning that the employees in their team are reasonably self-sufficient and require low levels of assistance and coordination from their leader. Highly professional teams were defined to reach similarity among the teams. The employees needed to be civil servants (i.e., white-collar workers), with a majority of the team either having a degree in their profession or a protected title. Regarding the definition of 'teams,' this refers to the group of employees the respondents manage. The respondents of this study range from leaders of smaller groups of employees inside an organization to whole offices of employees where the respondent has leadership responsibility for the whole group at the office. Thus, the definition of hybrid teams differs between the respondents in terms of the number of employees they are leading, and this is important to consider in terms of comparability of the empirical results and hence the criticism of the study.

The respondents were compared to other respondents with similar positions in different departments within their own company and with respondents with similar positions in other organizations. Eisenheart (1989) describes this as within-case analysis and cross-case pattern searching, allowing the researcher first to gain familiarity with data and preliminary theory generation and then to look beyond initial impressions to see the material through multiple lenses. The respondents were furthermore strategically chosen to differ in gender, age, hierarchy, and the roles of the employees that they are managing to further nuance the data. The gathering of data was done through the selection of several companies that have undergone a shift to hybrid work, according to Eisenheart's recommendation to focus efforts on theoretically useful cases (1989). The choice of the companies where the respondents work resulted from a purposive sampling based on access and adaptation to the requirements of the study and convenience sampling and availability at the time, in line with recommendations by Bell et al. (2022). This was important as different types of companies are characterized by different organizational and leadership conditions, which can be translated to different challenges of the hybrid working situation. The purposive sampling contributed to the theoretical understanding of the subject, to be able to adhere to any possible differences in expected and actual leadership and management practices in general due to their traits and expertise as well as the type of team they are managing and company they operate in. (Bell et al., 2022; Eisenheart, 1989) Furthermore, the number of cases was

determined based on the saturation of data and the complexity of hybrid work initiatives (Bell et al., 2022). Lastly, the choice of the semi-structured interview was an attempt to capture how the respondents, in their leadership positions, experience how their leadership styles and management factors influence the experienced success of the organization in terms of hybrid work.

3.3 Primary data: Semi-structured interviews

The study's primary data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with respondents in leadership positions. The choice of a semi-structured style of the interviews allowed for reflective and nuanced responses from the interviewees, which enriched and deepened the gathered information (Bell et al., 2022). Furthermore, a low interference approach was practiced to avoid influencing the respondents, although allowing follow-up questions, probing questions, specifying questions, and an ad hoc way of interpreting the interview guide to allow for elaboration, individual adaptation, and a natural flow to the interview. This approach validated and complemented the findings from the primary data providing a more complete and nuanced understanding of the research questions. (Bell et al., 2022; Patel and Davidson, 2019)

Eight respondents were interviewed, later in the report referred to as R1-R8. Prior to the interviews, the respondents were informed about the subject and intent of the study, as well as briefed about the procedure for participation according to best practice (Bell et al., 2022; Patel & Davidson, 2019). However, the interviewees were only given limited information about the study and background information on the topic to avoid influencing the answers and thus create less biased and more neutral conditions going into the interviews. Furthermore, the respondents were asked to approve a recording of the interviews, although being informed that they are anonymous in the report due to ethical reasons and to encourage more honest and true responses. The interviews were recorded in order to be listened to afterward and to be able to take proper notes, but also to analyze tone and responses. The expected expenditure of time for the interviews was approximately 40 minutes. The interviews were conducted based on an interview guide, where interview questions were based on the theoretical frame of reference. All interviews were conducted using proprietary software for video calls. According to Bell et al. (2022) and Patel and Davidson (2019) is considered to be the best possible compromise next to a real-life interview. The style of interviews through the software Zoom or Teams was due to flexibility, time-saving, and to get the respondents to agree to an interview on short notice. Using a tool for a video meeting further ensured that the interviews captured the interviewees' responses and the tone, body language, and facial expressions to the extent possible at a hybrid meeting. The interviewees' consent to record the meeting was to ensure the possibility of rewatching and taking notes from the interviews and further ensure responsiveness and focus during the interviews. The interviews were fully transcribed using assistance from Word. Transcribing the interviews in this type of study is of utmost

importance to discover the intrusion of own biases and expectations in the interview material, to avoid “contaminating” the data, and hence put the validity of the research at risk (Bell et al., 2022; Patel & Davidson, 2019). Furthermore, for this type of research, transcribing is essential due to the ability to use quotes to strengthen the discussion (Bell et al., 2022). It is possible that the study would have increased reliability with a larger population of interviewees, including a wider range of companies. However, the existing material has been confirmed by the fact that several interviews have received similar results and ideas, which according to both Bell et al. (2022) and Eisenheart (1989), strengthens the belief that the gathered data is enough to confirm that the empirical basis is sufficient for this study in this context.

Respondent	Interview Time	Interview type	Medium
Respondent 1	49 minutes	Video call	Zoom
Respondent 2	38 minutes	Video call	Zoom
Respondent 3	39 minutes	Video call	Microsoft Teams
Respondent 4	44 minutes	Video call	Microsoft Teams
Respondent 5	52 minutes	Video Call	Microsoft Teams
Respondent 6	46 minutes	Video Call	Microsoft Teams
Respondent 7	35 minutes	Video Call	Microsoft Teams
Respondent 8	44 minutes	Video Call	Microsoft Teams

Table 2. Overview of interviews

3.4 Literature review

In order to address the research questions outlined in this thesis, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to gain further insight into the research subject and to maintain the iterative process of the abductive approach (Bell et al., 2022; Patel & Davidsson, 2019). The literature review was structured around the research questions outlined in the thesis’s introduction and synthesized to provide a comprehensive overview of the key leadership practices, challenges, and opportunities associated with the shift to hybrid work. The purpose of the literature review was to provide a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the existing research on the role of leadership in hybrid settings and to

identify best practices and potential areas for further research. (Bell et al., 2022; Patel & Davidsson, 2019)

The literature review was further used to develop the theoretical framework and to apply and analyze it in relation to the empirical data from which the interview guide was based, and furthermore, the data was analyzed. Furthermore, the gathered data were compared with similar literature to sharpen generalizability and improve the construct definition to raise the theoretical level of the set study. Moreover, the data was compared with conflicting literature to help build internal validity. The literature review was conducted from previous research, literature, and scientific articles in the field of organization theory, with a focus on leadership and hybrid work. According to best practices by Bell et al. (2022) and Patel & Davidsson (2019), the literature review for this thesis involved the process of identification, selection, and analysis of relevant academic articles, books, and other published sources that related to the role of leadership styles and hybrid work. The literature review was conducted in several stages, starting with a systematic search using relevant keywords and search terms, such as 'hybrid work', 'remote work', 'leadership', and 'leadership styles'. The search was done using academic databases and search tools for academic literature such as GUPEA, Google Scholar, and Sage Journals, as well as relevant industry publications and reports. The articles and publications identified in the search were thoroughly screened and selected based on their relevance to the study's research questions. Articles that did not directly relate to the key topics of the study as well as articles that were not 'peer-reviewed,' were generally excluded to be reassured of the quality of the research. The remaining articles were then reviewed in detail, where key themes, trends, and insights were extracted and analyzed accordingly, where the literature was synthesized, commonalities identified, and variations and contradictions analyzed. Lastly, the literature review included a critical analysis of the literature, highlighting gaps in the existing research and identifying areas where further research was needed. (Bell et al., 2022)

3.5 Interview guide

For this study, an interview guide, provided in the appendix, was prepared to aid in the data gathering i.e., the semi-structured interviews. Using an interview guide offered a robust structure to fall back on, combined with individual flexibility approaching every interview (Bell et al., 2022; Patel & Davidson, 2019). The interview questions in the interview guide were intended to elicit information about the general knowledge about leadership styles, the leadership styles that leaders practice in hybrid work settings, and how these practices have contributed to the success of the hybrid teams. By conducting in-depth interviews with leaders in the selected organizations, the thesis gained a rich understanding of the role of leadership styles in hybrid work settings and identified the best practices that leaders and organizations can adopt to practice effective leadership in hybrid work teams. The idea was that

depending on the answers and talkativeness of the respondents, additional questions could be added to the interview guide to gain a deeper understanding and further benefit the research's aim. However, this was done cautiously to prevent any influence or subjectivity, mitigate bias, and maintain consistency across the interviews that could occur through ad hoc questioning.

Apart from an introduction and conclusion, the interview guide follows four main topics; 'Background,' 'Leadership,' 'Hybrid work,' and 'Leadership in Hybrid settings.' The 'Background' questions have provided insight into the respondent's experience, their description of their workplace, their tasks, and their perception of the team they are in charge of. The 'Leadership' topic gives insight into the general knowledge and understanding of leadership as a concept, how the respondent views themselves as a leader, and how they practice leadership in their role. The topic of 'Hybrid work' investigated how hybrid work has affected the organization and the employees in terms of perceived effectiveness and well-being. The last topic, 'Leadership styles,' was developed to give insight into how the interviewees and organizations practice leadership in their hybrid teams and what challenges and opportunities they see when leading teams in hybrid settings. The idea was to start with a broader perspective to get to know the respondent and then narrow the focus down to gain understanding and perspectives on the core of the research questions and for the interview to have a natural flow while allowing for any required emergent changes in the order during the interviews. (Bell et al., 2022; Patel & Davidsson, 2019)

3.6 Qualitative thematic analysis

The gathered data was analyzed through thematic analysis in order to process the raw interviews to reach an answer to the general research questions. (Bell et al., 2022) A thematic analysis was chosen since it combines a flexible and systematic approach to analyzing qualitative data by coding the data and then identifying key themes to recognize patterns in the data (Eisenhart, 1989). Therefore, this type of analysis was suitable for this research because it allows the researcher to find recurring topics and identify similarities and dissimilars (Bell et al., 2022). Using a thematic analysis for the data further increased the validity of the research due to its systematic structuring. Furthermore, it intended to increase transparency and identify any bias in the data analysis. However, to be considered as with a thematic analysis is that it is possible to lose the context of data in the process. Moreover, the interpretation can become subjective if done solely by one person, as in this case. (Bell et al., 2022)

The thematic analysis procedure used in this thesis can be broken down into four steps: transcription, coding, gathering, and analysis (Bell et al., 2022). Transcribing the recorded interviews was necessary as the initial thematic analysis step. Furthermore, to code the text, the material was read several times to compare the codes in the numerous transcribed materials to what is pertinent to the research questions. Prior to coding the data, the transcriptions and notes from the interviews were thoroughly

read to gain an overview and familiarize with the material according to best practices (Bell et al., 2022). In this thesis, the coding is done through first-order ‘codes,’ where the coding is closely related to the interviews, i.e., the gathered data. Here, relevant expressions or statements frequently relevant to the research question were marked out in the transcription documents through an inductive approach to coding, where the codes are derived from the data. Excel was used to visualize the emergent codes and to understand their connections and disparities. After this, these codes were colored and categorized into common themes, where themes were built by appropriately combining the first-order codes when recognizing patterns or relationships. The transcription and thematic analysis of the data was started in conjunction with the interviews since it is best to do this when the interviews were recently completed (Bell et al., 2022; Patel & Davidson, 2017). This makes it easier to spot similarities because one can still clearly recall the interviews. Lastly, the analysis and interpretation of the data and codes was the final step of the thematic analysis (Bell et al., 2022). The presented outcome of the analysis of the interviews intended to enlighten the connection between leadership styles and hybrid work and is shown in Figure 4, Identified Themes and Codes.

3.7 Ethical considerations

A prerequisite for conducting this study, in the form of a case study, was to ensure that the companies and the interviewees under study remain anonymous. In order to address any challenges posed by the anonymity, any description of the interviewees, organizations, industry, and overall activities was done in consultation with the participants. This was to provide full anonymity combined with a thorough understanding of the type of activities and work that forms the basis of the leadership being examined in the study. Furthermore, the recorded interviews were stored securely, only available to the author, and coded anonymously to protect the interviewees and provide the promised confidentiality. The recordings were transcribed shortly after the interviews, and afterward, the recordings were removed, with only the anonymous transcribed data remaining. Furthermore, the data were analyzed and reported in a way intended to respect the privacy and confidentiality of the interviewees, ensuring that the full anonymity of the individuals and their organization remained throughout the data gathering and analysis process.

The qualitative starting point of the study is further relevant from an ethical point of view regarding the choice of method for the case study. Since it is based on people’s individual in-depth and detailed descriptions of experiences, it is important to treat the information with trust and respect (Bell et al., 2022; Patel & Davidsson, 2019). Each interview constitutes a substantial part of the empirical data, which makes the situation more sensitive and the processing of the collected information and the preparation and design of the interview even more important. To ensure the anonymity of both the interviewees on an individual level and the anonymity of the organizations in the study, information

regarding the ethical considerations for the study was provided during the initial contact and at the interview. The purpose of the study and the premises for participation were clearly and carefully explained in writing, informing that participation is voluntary and can be terminated at any time. The interviewees were asked to consent to recording the interviews to facilitate the transcription of the material. The interviews were furthermore transcribed into a text document. Any use of quotes was delivered to the subject for inspection and consent and corrected by the interviewees if necessary. Here, the interviewees had the opportunity to change quotes or correct any misunderstandings. Furthermore, the information covered that anonymity prevails when using the information and that the material was treated confidentially. (Bell et al., 2022; Patel & Davidsson, 2019)

3.7 Criticism

3.7.1 Criticism of Study

This study has been carried out over a shorter period, i.e., a delimitation has been made in the scope of the study. The study needed to be larger and more comprehensive to give more weight and draw more general conclusions. The narrow scope of the study makes it difficult to draw any general conclusions. The limited sample size could further affect the generalizability of the study's findings. Furthermore, this excludes valuable insights from employees and their perspectives. However, it could create a foundation for further, more in-depth studies, where the study can provide indications of phenomena of hybrid work, both on an organizational level and general indications for whole industries and societies facing similar situations of digitalization and adaptations of working models. Moreover, the study has a time constraint since the voluntary continuation of hybrid work is still fairly recent, and hence the ability to analyze the long-term effects of this shift is limited. Following organizations before the pandemic shift, during the transition to hybrid forms of work, and after could have facilitated the analysis and strengthened any conclusions. Furthermore, long-term follow-up studies could further add to the findings to understand the course of events affecting organizations as a whole.

Furthermore, the fact that the chosen interviewees are working in leadership positions in different companies with somewhat different roles and employees could lower the comparability and strength of the result since their views could differ due to the context they operate in rather than the perceived emotions regarding hybrid work. As mentioned in the sampling chapter, the definition of hybrid teams differ between the respondents in terms of the number of employees they are leading, and this is important to consider in terms of the comparability of the empirical results. Another important perspective to consider was the limitations of only interviewing leaders regarding their perspective of the hybrid work situation and how they view their leadership and adaptations to this shift. This limited

scope of the analysis could imply self-report bias, inaccuracies, and hence validity. The self-awareness of the interviewees was hence crucial in the reliability of the results, and it was likely believed that there could be gaps in the perceived own leadership and actions of the interviewed leaders and what is actually perceived by the employees and other managers in the organizations. Moreover, the geographic scope of the study, where all the interviewees are from the same country, could affect any generalizability of the analysis and results due to cultural norms.

Lastly, regarding the models used in the study, one can discuss reliability and applicability to this study. The usage of ‘The Full Range Leadership model’ and ‘The Leadership Styles Links with Virtual Team Effectiveness Dimensions model’ for this study can be criticized. The leadership model might have lost accuracy due to its age and furthermore, the digitalization of society, new leadership and organizational practices, changes in employees, and the context of where leadership is taking place. Reading about the work of Bass & Avolio (1994), this model is based on ideas and assumptions even longer back in time, which could be questioned in terms of accuracy today. Furthermore, the applicability of this model to leadership during hybrid work can be somewhat problematic since that was not its original intention. The usage of the ‘The Leadership Styles Links with Virtual Team Effectiveness Dimensions model’ can be criticized for limited understanding since the original article describing the study and theory is relatively short, allowing for misunderstandings, false perceptions, and adaptations. Moreover, this research examines leadership in virtual settings, which differs from hybrid ones. Furthermore, the development of the theoretical framework is based primarily on the theories mentioned above and models conducted by Bass & Avolio (1994), and hence, previously mentioned criticism of those models and concepts is the basis for the own developed framework used in the analysis of the data and conclusion of the study. Lastly, the Theoretical Framework can be criticized because it is based on the above-mentioned models and their theories. Hence, this framework’s reliability and accuracy depend on the research mentioned above’s reliability and accuracy.

3.7.2 Criticism of the Method

The idea of this study was that the proposed research strategy, research design, and data analysis should fit the study’s purpose and be useful to conclude the chosen research questions. However, to be reflected upon are some possible criticism of the conducted study must be reflected upon. Firstly, the interview guide was conducted before the interviews were held. Although it has undergone testing beforehand, this could create a lack in the effectiveness of information gathering for this particular study and research questions (Bell et al., 2022; Patel & Davidsson, 2019). This could, however, be solved along the way by asking the participants to do follow-up questions at a later stage. Moreover, during the stage of data gathering, sampling-related issues could occur. Issues could further have arisen

related to the requirement to negotiate access to organizations due to limited reasonable personal contacts with the correct requirements and positions of respondents. One of the limitations of the choice of a qualitative study compared to a quantitative one was the sample size, and it can be both difficult and costly and might be unnecessary to obtain a large number of participants during qualitative research. However, any issue regarding insecurities about the sample size could have been addressed by being flexible in the number of interview participants and adding more participants if it seemed to contribute to new insights. Furthermore, although a case study has its previously mentioned advantages and, in general, was a suitable choice for this particular study and phenomenon, it lacked depth and nuance in the possible analysis of the gathered empirical data (Bell et al., 2022).

Another issue in terms of bias could be a sampling bias, where the chosen sample was somewhat skewed or not representative of a population (Bell et al., 2022). For instance, using a purposive sampling method could have introduced bias and damaged the data gathering, which was the basis of the finding in the report. If there was any limitation regarding possible participants, this could have been solved by including a thorough explanation of this perceived limitation during the analysis and criticism of the report. Another possible problem related to the data collection of this study is observation bias, where the acknowledgment of being observed could affect how participants behave or respond during the interviews. In this type of interview setting, it was difficult to know if this was occurring; however, awareness that the problem might be affecting the results was considered during the data analysis. Lastly, ethical issues could have arisen during the project, such as anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy, could have arisen during the project. This was solved by informed consent and thorough information about how the information will be used. (Bell et al., 2022)

Further criticism of conducting a qualitative study of this sort for this specific research question was that it could produce somewhat subjective results, both in terms of the respondents' answers and further from the analysis and results thereof. Moreover, this study only investigates the insight and experiences of one side, the leader. How the employees interpret the leader and his/her leadership style and management practices is likely to differ and be more varied. However, this subjective view sheds light on what the respondents find important and their personal take. Furthermore, another important factor to consider is that the results of this type of qualitative research can be difficult to replicate due to different circumstances, and transparency and generalization issues could have occurred. Lastly, the qualitative thematic analysis could lack reliability since it was somewhat prone to subjectivity when there was only one coder of the data, and hence the analysis could be criticized for being biased or the findings invalid. There is a further risk of losing the context during the thematic analysis, where the responses are oversimplified or misrepresented. This was approached by trying to identify patterns and common themes from the interviews while balancing this with preserving the nuance of the gathered data to the extent that it was possible.

3.7.3 Criticism of the Literature Review

Due to the scope of the research, the literature review could have been argued to be somewhat limited in terms of perspectives, diversity, and cited authors, which could limit the nuance and comprehensiveness of the material (Bell et al., 2022). Furthermore, there was a mix of older and newer sources, where the older ones can be argued to be outdated. However, due to the strength and importance of the research of these older sources, they have been kept in the literature review and, instead, both strengthened and questioned by newer sources. Moreover, due to possible researcher subjectivity, relevant studies might have been overlooked in the literature selection process. Furthermore, an aspect that largely characterizes the context of previous similar studies on hybrid work in the context of leadership was an ongoing pandemic, and thus a situation that imposed hybrid work and hybrid leadership. During these periods when hybrid leadership was studied, strict restrictions on social interaction affected society in general. Thus, there is limited research on the ongoing voluntary hybrid work situation when life outside work is back to normal, or at least a new normal. Hence, several sources are research based on fully remote teams rather than teams operating in hybrid settings. Therefore, the generalizability of these sources might not be applicable in terms of analyzing hybrid work due to its difference in nature, where remote work is combined with on-site work, creating a somewhat different playing field with different challenges and opportunities for the leaders, employees and organizations. (Bell et al., 2022)

4. Empirical Findings

The Empirical Findings chapter presents the data collected from the eight interviews with leaders of hybrid teams. The data is synthesized and handled through thematic coding, presented in Figure 4, Identified themes and codes. The chapter presents the empirical findings in the same order as the literature review, first addressing Hybrid Work Settings, secondly Leadership in Hybrid Work Settings, and lastly, Leadership styles in hybrid settings. The chapter ends with tables summarizing the results from the interviews visually in tables and figures, comparing the Described important Leadership Styles with the Actual practiced Leadership Styles based on The Full Range Leadership Model. Furthermore, the figure of identified Themes & Codes is updated and merged with The Full Range Leadership Model to facilitate the understanding of the empirical result from a theoretical lens and assist in the data analysis.

4.1 Identified Themes & Codes

As presented in the methodology chapter, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed through the process of thematic analysis. The themes and codes found by the thematic analysis are visualized and presented below in Figure 4. Identified Themes & Codes. The first theme found during the thematic analysis was ‘Leadership.’ This theme was of focus in the literature review and the base of the interview guide since the interviewees held leadership positions. The second theme was ‘Organization’ since the organization is the foundation of change and what supports the leaders in their decisions and actions, and what enables the adaption of working methods for the employees through initiatives, policies, and strategy. The third theme found was ‘Self-leadership’, how employees are expected by organizations and their leaders to take responsibility in the new work settings. Lastly, the fourth code found was ‘Communication’ since this was generally described as the most challenging theme of hybrid work.



Figure 4. Identified Themes & Codes

4.2 Hybrid Work Settings

The interviewees have identified both challenges and opportunities associated with hybrid work. All the respondents generally expressed similar descriptions and opinions concerning the hybrid work setting. Moreover, all of the interviewees in this study emphasized how they enjoy the opportunity of working in a hybrid setting and that a majority of the employees appreciate the continued opportunity of hybrid work. Furthermore, they expressed confidence that this is the new normal for many organizations, to the extent that it is possible. All respondents stated that their company is doing well in contributing to the readjustment to hybrid work. Guidelines from above, contribution to the conditions in the home office and analysis thereof, frequent information about remote work practices and updated knowledge for effective and balanced remote work, and cooperation with trade unions are described to some extent by all respondents. Furthermore, it was expressed that hybrid work is a continuous development with frequent adaptations to optimize working with new tools, technologies, and policies.

The respondents found that many of their employees have higher motivation directly connected to the possibility of choosing how and where they want to work. It was described that during the pandemic, some lack of motivation was present among employees, but this could be due to outside factors of fear and isolation and the forced nature of remote work at the time. Today, the employees that work partly remotely have done this by their own choice, and are explained to perform well and work efficiently in combination with positive effects such as reduced time of commuting, and the fact that they can start and end their working day as soon as they open or shut down their computers. Furthermore, the interviewees agree upon a perceived richer social life themselves and among the employees with more time spent with close ones directly connected to the hybrid work form.

It was further expressed that the opportunities for skills development through training & advancement are now greater than ever due to the development of digital courses during the pandemic combined with the possibility of on-site training. The respondents agreed upon major differences now with hybrid work compared to the pandemic remote work. During the pandemic, the respondents generally felt that the remote working situation somewhat limited the opportunities for development and further training for themselves and their employees, where organizations were somewhat “on pause.” However, all of them now describe that the opportunities for this are now larger than ever, where digital tools have been adapted and evolved to assist in training. Especially since they do not operate in a full remote setting but rather a hybrid one, offering both digital and on-site opportunities. Development and training are more heavily digitized, with workshops and courses being held through digital tools or channels. This is described as positive due to cost savings for the organizations and the fact that it is often easier for people to participate. R2 describes how the organization has been helpful and attentive in the shift to hybrid work:

“I think that the company has been great. I mean... It is a win for them to be able to continue with hybrid work; they can save money in many ways. They know that a lot of people appreciate being able to decide (where they work, ed.) so it is good for the reputation of the company. So I would say that they try their best to facilitate the employees and us leaders with the tools we need to continue with hybrid work.” (R2)

While remote work had a major impact on the psychosocial work environment of many during the pandemic, many positive aspects of continued work in a hybrid setting are expressed. The respondents lift a common view that their employees, and themselves, get more done remotely. They can work without spontaneous interruptions from others, and they save time commuting,

eating lunch, and so forth. However, a majority agree that a hybrid form rather than a fully remote work setting is the optimum, where employees work partly from home and partly from the office, as most stated that they and a majority of the employees would otherwise miss the social cohesion and contact with colleagues, which can be somewhat difficult to provide equivalently in a fully digital workplace.

“Would you work for an organization that would not allow remote work for at least some days? I do not think that is an option anymore in the companies it is a possibility. We must accept the new normal where people work from home some days.” (R4)

Although the general view of hybrid work was positive, all respondents further expressed that a minority of employees want the work situation to return to the original situation where all employees worked in the office, as they express that hybrid work is not a long-term solution due to its negatives on many important factors. What was emphasized by all respondents as the most challenging part of hybrid forms of work was in line with findings from similar studies, the perceived corporate culture, social contact, the sense of belonging, and group cohesion in the team. When the social aspect of work is limited through digital-only meetings and contacts, what is described as an important social dimension of the organization can be lost. Although it differs, the workplace is, for many, the place where people get their social interaction throughout the week. All the respondents describe a general view that the employees are satisfied with the opportunity of hybrid work. Issues connected to remote work are less than during the pandemic due to the extreme isolation and social life many people experienced at that time. Remote work is voluntary, and people can have a healthy social life outside of work. However, R1, among others, explains that although the hybrid form of work is voluntary, there are employees that want to be at the office at all times and that these are the people that express that they miss the pre-pandemic office culture:

“For some people, their social life is mainly with their colleagues at work, they might not have a partner or family or close friends. These are the employees that I think miss the traditional office work the most; even if they are on-site many of their colleagues are at home. Then there are people with a rich social life privately who also want a social work life. (R1)

According to the interviewees, the allowance for working remotely has also increased the opportunities for planning their own days and how they carry out their work for the employees. It could be correlated to how often you want to work from home compared to the office, which is how much social you have outside of work. The social context during leisure time seems to be the

single largest factor discussed in the content of remote work when you no longer get social interaction through work. Although technical conditions and efficiency have proven to work smoothly, most people would agree that we humans are social beings who need to interact with other people outside the digital sphere, albeit to a different extent. During the pandemic, the forced form of remote work could create difficulties when the remote working situation is not by choice. Today, however, all the interviewees of this study describe how a hybrid form of work is completely voluntary, which removes many of the concerns that remote work brought during the pandemic. Furthermore, since society is open and back to normal, people are not as deprived of social life and might not seek out social interactions to the same extent as work. This could be compared to studies during the pandemic shift, where social existence was severely complicated by the pandemic's restrictions on social interaction that coincide with hybrid work. At this time, employees were, to a larger extent, individually affected depending on their life situations outside of work, where a limited social context out of work could become a major problem due to unwanted isolation. R7 describes team communication as less frequent, requiring more effort, and less casual:

“Working from home can make people very isolated. Some days I find that I have not actually talked to anyone all day, and I am a manager with personnel responsibility. I can imagine how isolated other employees can be at times. I think human interaction is important instead of just looking at a screen all day.” (R7)

Due to the hybrid work model, The respondents believe that everyday communication and spontaneous meetings have decreased. As a result, the respondents describe that they have had to adapt their leadership, mainly through increased clarity and support for their employees. The respondents describe that during the pandemic digital meetings were in general appreciated and that many of the employees especially expressed an urge for “meetings” that concern other than work-related matters to keep in touch with each other in the team and get a sense of belonging that was missing during the forced isolation of the pandemic. Today, this need seems less important during the voluntary form of hybrid work combined with no societal restrictions. All interviewees in this study express that this could be because most employees are located at the office some days of the week and how meetings are planned so that the teams catch up at the office at least once a week. Furthermore, all respondents describe having mostly digital meetings and fewer physical ones since it is seldom that all employees are on site. The pandemic established the habit of using digital meeting tools, and their simplicity and flexibility are described to make them superior to a physical one. R4 and R6 reason regarding meetings:

“Of course, it is much nicer to meet in person. But it is difficult to defend people commuting to work for a meeting that could have been a digital video call where all can attend from where they are at the time. It is like when people say, “this meeting could have been an email”, well, now we think, “this physical meeting could have been a Teams call.” (R4).

“We try to have at least one office meeting per week to catch up and to meet each other. It is for the team spirit and corporate culture mostly. However, we often have someone attending through video call anyways.” (R6)

Although adapting a hybrid way of working offers good substitutes, for example, communication through digital channels, the communication is described to take place differently, where spontaneous communication and meetings are lost during the digital channels compared to on-site settings. Digital tools are expressed to be effective in assisting everyday work. However, replacing physical presence with digital tools is hard:

“I mean..the digital tools make communication quite easy. However, I think sometimes we are lazy. It is like the difference if you live with a friend and talk with them all the time, compared to writing to them from a distance. Writing takes more effort than talking in person at the office” (R3)

On the negative side, worry about employee disparities was lifted. Possible inequality between the employees when working remotely due to differences in their private lives. For example, sometimes family members who also work from home can be perceived as a problem, but at the same time, it is appreciated from a social aspect. Furthermore, the opportunity and equality connected to development and promotions can be affected by how the employees choose to work and to what extent they are present at the office. R1 and R2 expressed how the presence of employees might make them more visible to higher management, which could create inequality regarding career opportunities:

“In my role as a leader, I have a fear that my senses can mislead me. I feel like it is easier to see what is actually visible at the office on-site and that I unintentionally neglect employees that do a great job remotely just because they are not in the office as much...The choice of hybrid work should not create different employee opportunities” (R1).

“Something that we work a lot with, that I think is very important, is to avoid potential inequality in the team. It can be a trap between remote or on-site employees. We work hard trying to make everyone feel included, and with that, your choice of work setting should not affect your feeling of support and opportunities at the company. That you belong to the team.” (R2)

4.3 Leadership in Hybrid Work Settings

The respondents describe how feedback can be more difficult to implement and less frequent in practice during a hybrid work setting, where it, once again, requires more planning and less spontaneity. All interviewees perceive feedback as more difficult to execute since hybrid communication is less clear and frequent than on-site communication. However, this could also be positive, where the planned nature of feedback could create an equal situation where all employees get the same amount of time and encouragement. The interviewees describe how they are still trying to find ways to facilitate the hybrid of communication and feedback and encourage employees to be more active in asking for the level of feedback to meet their needs. The respondents reported difficulties seeing needs remotely, but many try communicating with employees to get the right picture of needs and motivate them in their hybrid work. Furthermore, the interviewees expressed that the hybrid setting requires clearer, more frequent feedback due to less spontaneous digital communication. This is something expressed by R1 that they evaluate and want to improve and that they provide support and feedback if requested:

“I try to be responsive to what each team member needs....I think this responsiveness, and some emotional intelligence, is even more important in hybrid teams since the distance removes obvious cues or cries for help since we do not see each other as much.” (R1)

The interviewees further emphasize the importance of personal responsibility and self-leadership in working remotely. However, the challenge with this is further described as what can be experienced as greater suspicion and reporting requirements from employees when they are not in the office. R6 express how their company and they as leaders have high trust in their employees:

“I trust everyone until they prove that I can not. It is a good team; I do not want to be the type of leader that controls if my team members are logged on to Teams at all times of the day.” (R6)

Employee autonomy and self-leadership were frequently discussed throughout the interviews. All the organizations interviewed in this study implied high trust in the employees and generally low level of requirements of reporting. Employee autonomy was emphasized, where the employees should be aware that they have support available when needed. According to the R3 and R4, targets and follow-ups allow for everyday trust in the employees in their independent work:

“I try to be very clear with goals and expectations for the team, and this is expected from the organization. We also have frequent feedback and follow-up sessions” (R4)

“I do not really care how you do your job. We are all individuals, and like to do things differently. As long as you adequately do your job, I am happy and the company is happy.” (R3)

The respondents see different needs for the employees in their team and have different approaches to promoting the social aspect of work. This is lifted as requiring improvement, such as more straightforward and more frequent communication. The respondents mean that they have experienced a strengthened obligation as a social support person due to the hybrid setting, and how they now more than ever need to see the needs of each employee at an individual level, which is in line with the theories of hybrid leadership:

“I would say that my leadership in remote settings requires a lot more planning and structure. For example, casual feedback or support, or just conversation does not happen digitally in the same way. However, I still want to give it, and I think many of my team members need it. So it requires more time and more effort.” (R7)

Furthermore, the respondents emphasize how the hybrid work setting sometimes can cause more pressure in the role of a leader since the lack of visibility goes two ways. The employees sometimes expect the leader to be available at all times since the hybrid setting can cause a false sense of availability compared to the office setting:

“We talk a lot about the employees and their well-being and work-life balance during remote work. Without being selfish, I think it is important to talk about that even if hybrid work brings many advantages, it can be very stressful....It sometimes feels that employees think that I am available all the time only for them and that they do not understand that I have many individual needs to adhere to.” (R2)

“...Many times it can be small things or small favors that people ask for, but it adds up, and many small favors take up a lot of time” (R3).

As a result of the changed situation, the study has shown that leadership must be adapted to maintain well-being and group cohesion. Based on the study's results, the manager's role has, or should, changed to become more socially coordinated as this is required due to the changing situation of employees. Personalized leadership is required to meet the needs of each employee. It also requires far-reaching communication clarity and leadership exercise in hybrid settings. R5 confirms this:

“I would say that, especially in a hybrid work setting, leaders need to be “on toes,” to be very adaptable to chain circumstances in the organization and for the employees. This could be, for example, shifts in the work, changing team dynamics, and also new technologies or tools or policies that the organization is adapting.” (R7)

4.3.1 Leadership Styles in Hybrid Settings

To merge the empirical insights from hybrid work, leadership, and leadership style, the tables below were made to understand any patterns and connections between knowledge about and understanding of leadership as a concept and the *actually* practiced leadership styles in the hybrid setting. To understand how the respondents interpret leadership and how they implement it in their roles, questions were asked to understand their views on leadership and how they *actually* work with their leadership roles. The below table is intended to visualize which of Respondents 1-8 identify traits of the different leadership styles as necessary in hybrid leadership.

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8
Laissez-Faire		x		x				
TRANSACTIONAL								
Passive mgm by exception								
Active mgm by exception	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Contingent reward	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
TRANSFORMATIONAL								
Individual Consideration	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Intellectual stimulation	x		x		x		x	x
Inspirational Motivation	x	x			x			x
Idealized influence								

Table 3. Empirical findings, Described important Leadership Styles. Based on The Full Range Leadership Model (Bass & Avolio, 1994),

In the interviews, R2 and R4 brought up leadership traits associated with the Laissez-Faire leadership style. None of the respondents mentioned any leadership traits associated with Passive mgm by exception. All respondents identified ‘Active Management by Exception’ as an essential leader competence. ‘Active Management by Exception’ could imply factors such as setting clear directions, and expectations, monitoring activities and tasks, delegating, and planning.

Furthermore, all respondents R1-R8 identified traits associated with ‘Contingent Reward’ as important for leadership in hybrid settings. This could imply giving feedback, recognition, rewarding, satisfying work, following up on goal setting, etc. R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, and R8 all lifted leadership traits associated with ‘Individual Consideration,’ such as mentoring, empathy, individual feedback, and support. R1, R3, R5, R6, R7, and R8 all brought up leadership styles associated with ‘Intellectual Stimulation,’ which could stimulate intellectual and creative thinking for development and encourage employees to develop and further education. R1, R2, R5, and R8 described traits adhering to Inspirational Motivation as important for leaders. This could imply traits such as visioning a purpose, rallying the group towards a common goal, and providing inspirational and positive guidance to the employees. Lastly, none of the respondents expressed leadership styles adhering to Idealized influence. Furthermore, below is a summarized table of what type of leadership styles they explained and what they state that they actually implement in their leadership role. In general, comparing the results of what each respondent scored in terms of how the respective leader competency is important, with what type of leadership styles and traits they explained to what they state that they actually implement in their leadership role, most of the results tell that they “live as they preach.” However, there are some apparent differences between what the respondents describe as important behaviors of leaders and what they actually seem to implement in their practiced leadership.

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8
Laissez-Faire		x		x				
TRANSACTIONAL								
Passive mgm by exception								
Active mgm by exception		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Contingent reward	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
TRANSFORMATIONAL								
Individual Consideration	x		x		x		x	x
Intellectual stimulation	x	x			x		x	x
Inspirational Motivation	x	x			x	x	x	x
Idealized influence	x							

Table 4. Empirical findings, Actual practiced Leadership Styles. Based on The Full Range Leadership Model (Bass & Avolio, 1994)

Below, the empirical findings are summarized through the previously identified themes, and codes are updated and merged with The Full Range Leadership Model (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Overall, the results show how the interviewed leaders describe themselves as practicing a broad mix of laissez-faire, Transactional and Transformational leadership styles. However, the category of common codes that fit under the headline of transformational style is overrepresented.

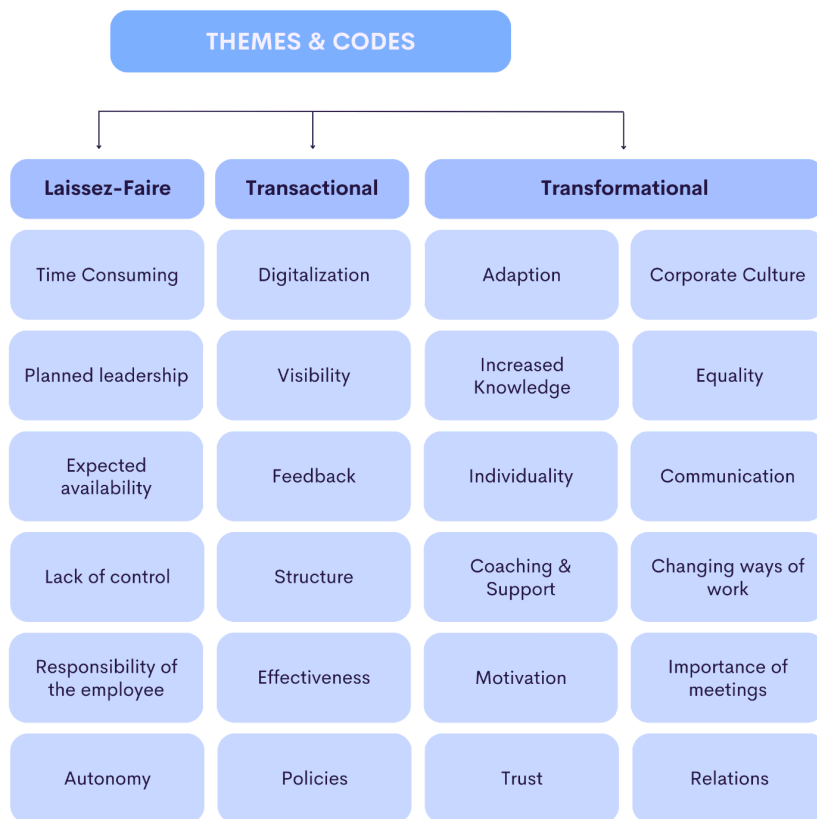


Figure 5. Identified Themes & Codes analyzed, updated and coded with The Full Range Leadership Model (Avolio & Bass, 1994).

5. Data Analysis

The sixth chapter analyzes the empirical findings based on the literature review and the theoretical framework presented in the second chapter. The analysis starts by presenting the limitations of the study. Furthermore, the chapter follows the same structure as the chapter 'Empirical Findings', beginning with an analysis of the hybrid work setting, followed by an analysis of the findings of leadership and leadership styles in hybrid settings. Lastly, the analysis is summarized to provide needed insights for the conclusion of the thesis.

5.1 Limitations of Study

This study comes with some general limitations that are important to highlight. First, the study has a limited sample size of $n=8$ and is a one-time study. Hence, there is a lack of material to strengthen the conclusions, requiring more in-depth studies with larger sample sizes. It is possible that the study would have increased reliability with a larger population of interviewees, including a wider range of companies. However, the existing material has been confirmed by the fact that several interviews have received similar results and ideas, which according to Eisenheart (1989) and Bryman & Bell (2022), strengthens the belief that the gathered data is enough to confirm that the empirical basis is sufficient for this study in this context. Secondly, there is a limitation in the choice of interviewing leaders regarding their leadership style and perceived effectiveness. There is an obvious possibility for false answers or answers that are believed to be truthful but where the interviewee lacks self-awareness. Furthermore, the knowledge among leaders today about generally “good” leadership practices might imply that leaders tend to talk about their own leadership in terms that it aligns with those theories. Furthermore, they may withhold any difficulties, challenges, or flaws of their leadership in the interview setting. Lastly, no measurement of the actual success of the organizations or the teams of the leaders has been done. Hence, it is not possible by this study to draw any general conclusions regarding the connection between the leader, his or her leadership style, and the actual success of the organization and the hybrid work setting of the team. The conclusion is thereby merely an acceptance of the provided information by the team leader.

5.2 Hybrid Work Settings

In line with recent research, this study supports the idea that hybrid and remote work is the new normal for many organizations (McKinsey, 2020). Overall, the interviewees perceived the employees as satisfied with the hybrid opportunity of work, where better work-life balance, flexibility and a more individually tailored work experience can be achieved, in line with the research by McKinsey (2022). However, in line with previous research from McKinsey (2020) and McKinsey (2022), it was expressed by the respondents that hybrid work comes with several challenges.

A general gap in understanding needs was expressed due to a lack of communication and visibility. The benefits of hybrid work were described to include increased motivation among employees, high efficiency of work, reduced commuting time, more flexibility, and a richer social life outside of the world due to free time. This aligns with the research from (McKinsey, 2020; McKinsey, 2022). Furthermore, the loss of team cohesion and social interaction is the most significant challenge in the hybrid setting, supported by previous research (Larson & Dechurch, 2020). Here, corporate culture and a sense of belonging to the group were expressed as great challenges for the organization and in terms of the leadership to combat this. It was found that the leaders generally expressed that they are open to change and feedback and try their best to be open and communicate with the employees to understand their needs better. This aligns with the ideas of Schwarzmüller et al. (2018), which suggest that a more nuanced and accurate basis for leadership and future decisions is fostered by striving to get employees involved and seeking ideas and feedback. Furthermore, a constant adaptation to new ways of working and new tools and policies to enhance more efficient communication, clear leadership, and strong support and motivation for the employees is in line with the research by Larson and Dechurch (2020) and McKinsey (2020).

The respondents emphasized strong support from the organizations in terms of readjustment activities for the hybrid work, such as cooperation with trade unions, updated guidelines, practices, and support to contribute to the home office of the employees. This aligns with the ideas of Larson and Dechurch (2020), who emphasized the importance of providing employees with good opportunities to work and creating structure. Furthermore, the hybrid setting was described to have generated more opportunities for personal development for the employees compared to the pre-pandemic and pandemic times, with the organizations offering both digital and on-site courses and workshops. Continued provision of opportunities for personal development was emphasized by Larson and Dechurch (2020) to be important in remote settings to keep the team motivated.

Lastly, there is a need for leaders and organizations to adhere to negative views of hybrid work that reside from a minority of the employees, who would prefer the old ways of working and see more challenges than opportunities with the hybrid way. Although hybrid work is voluntary, it has changed how many organizations operate and the corporate culture of the office. This goes in line with the

research by Schwarzmüller et al. (2018) and Larson et al. (2020), which emphasizes the importance of being considerate and understanding individual views of the shift to hybrid work to promote a more positive and cohesive work environment for the employees. Furthermore, the respondents emphasized the importance of understanding the possible negative consequences of inequality and dispersity, in line with the challenges expressed by McKinsey (2022).

5.3 Leadership in Hybrid Work Settings

The respondents expressed both challenges and opportunities associated with leading hybrid teams, in line with previous research (Gross, 2018; McKinsey, 2020; Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). It was found that the interviewed leaders generally expressed that they are open to change and feedback and try their best to be open and communicate with the employees to understand their needs better. Furthermore, a constant adaptation to new ways of working, to find ways to enhance more efficient communication, clear leadership, and strong employee support and motivation. The respondents further expressed how they try to provide clear communication and more frequent feedback. However, this requires a lot more planning compared to the on-site situation, which is described as much more spontaneous. This aligns with the ideas of Schwarzmüller et al. (2018), suggesting that leaders should strive to get employees involved and seek ideas and feedback from them; a more nuanced and accurate basis for leadership and future decisions is fostered. Furthermore, there is a common understanding among the interviewees that it often requires more time and effort to motivate, give feedback and provide support remotely, and this is described as taking up more time from the leaders. Depending on what leadership style they practice, this could be explained by the ideas from Bass and Avolio (2018) that suggest that transformational leadership can be more time-consuming. The leaders furthermore express that they ask for help and heads up from the employees to make sure that the needs of the employees are met in terms of support and communication. This goes in line with the emphasis on the importance of transformational leadership style in a remote setting to create successful remote teams by De Smet et al. (2021), Puranova and Kenda (2018) and Wiatr and Showron-Mielnik (2023), who suggest that a relational focus is described as important due to factors such as trust, team building, problem-solving, and knowledge sharing within the teams.

The respondents further expressed how individual needs seem to differ among the employees, which further aligns with the ideas of Bell & Kozlowski (2002) about the individual needs of employees in remote settings. Bell & Kozlowski (2002) emphasize how the leadership in hybrid or remote teams differs vastly due to the uniqueness of different types of teams, and internally the individual needs to create effective leadership in virtual settings. However, on this note, the respondents expressed how the challenges of providing feedback could benefit equality in the team, where time and encouragement

from the leader are more equally dispersed when it is more planned. This could be helpful in terms of preventing any possible inequality and disparities described between remote and onsite workers by De Smet et al. (2021). In terms of the individual needs of the employees, the respondents expressed that they experience a stronger obligation to take on the role of a social support person in the hybrid setting. Furthermore, they explained how they need a more individual approach to the employees, understand individual needs, and provide individual leadership due to the hybrid setting. This aligns with the theories of Shwarsmüller et al. (2018), who suggested that leaders of hybrid teams should have a more inclusive leadership style with a higher degree of individual focus. Furthermore, it aligns with Bass and Avolio (1994) and Gross (2018) on transformational leadership in remote settings.

Responsibility and self-leadership were frequently discussed throughout the interviews as important factors for the hybrid setting. This aligns with the research from Erskine (2012), who promotes how self-leadership and a sense of responsibility can motivate employees, and how showing trust and delegating responsibility to employees thus increases productivity, which contributes positively to the organization's overall performance. Furthermore, the ideas of Alparslan (2022) suggest that self-leadership can positively affect employee performance through psychosocial empowerment. Furthermore, on this subject, the respondents in this study express low levels of control, direction, and reporting requirements of the employees. They express high trust and "freedom under responsibility" for the team. This aligns with Erskine's (2012) and Alparslan's (2022) theories regarding encouraging autonomy, showing trust, and delegating responsibilities to employees, thus increasing productivity and contributing to the organization's overall performance. However, targets and follow-ups were explained as the foundation of this trust since the work must be done in the end.

Lastly, some respondents described how they experienced the hybrid work setting as more time-consuming, pressuring, and challenging in their role as leaders than the on-site work. Previous research supports the idea that communication often is more time-consuming remotely, with research from Erskine (2012), who emphasized that remote leaders often spend more time getting an equivalent level of information as in a shared office. Furthermore, the research from Kelley & Kelloway (2012) and Larson and Dechurch (2020) stresses how remote work increases the risk of communication problems and misunderstandings due to how digital communication risks creating a sense of uncertainty and makes it difficult for the recipient to understand the content of the message and assimilate the information. Furthermore, the negative aspects of hybrid leadership were somewhat described due to the challenges with communication mentioned above, but furthermore due to a feeling that the lack of visibility promoted by hybrid work goes two ways, thereby sometimes creating a false sense of availability at all times of the leader, where the leader is expected to be available on an individual level at all times. This was not something that was particularly found to be addressed in the previous literature and research; however, Bass and Avolio (1994) and Gross (2018) describe how the

transformational leadership style requires more time and effort, and hence these leaders might operate in a more transformational style adding to stress and pressure of their practiced leadership. Furthermore, McKinsey (2021) emphasized that these productivity increases of remote work could have an unsustainable disadvantage associated with higher rates of reported symptoms of burnout among employees, which somewhat aligns with these findings. Overall, the comprehension of the previous research on hybrid work and leadership is that it is skewed to the employee experience of hybrid work and how leaders should adhere to facilitate their work. Hence, the leader's perspective in hybrid work is neglected in previous research, which is important to look into further due to possible issues with uncomfortable working conditions and possible burnouts among leaders due to continued and accelerated hybrid work.

5.4 Leadership Styles in Hybrid Work Settings

Leadership Styles in Hybrid Team Effectiveness

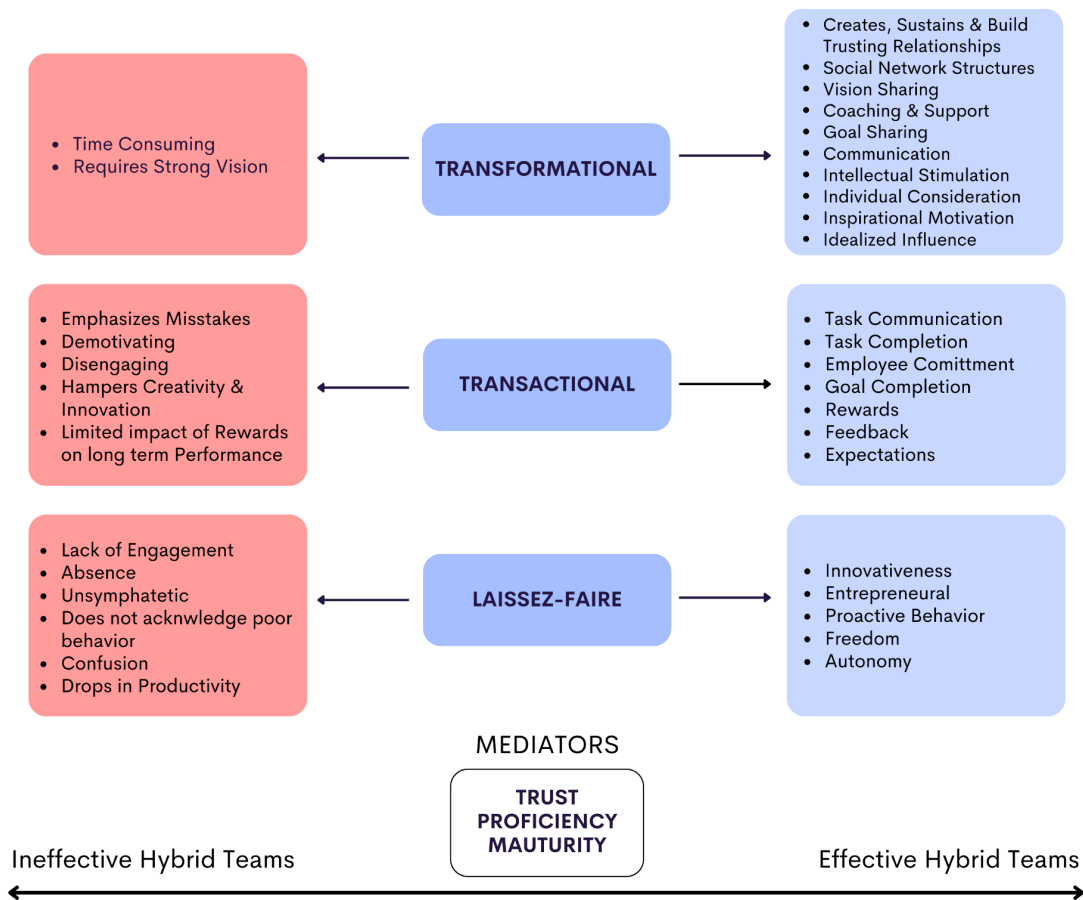


Figure 6. Theoretical Framework. Theoretical Framework: Leadership Styles in Hybrid Team Effectiveness

Based on Bass & Avolio (1994) and Gross (2018).

It was found that all leaders practice a mix of leadership styles in the hybrid setting, as emphasized naturally by Gross (2018) and Bass & Avolio (1994). Furthermore, the leadership behaviors that were described as desirable were traits according to the full-range leadership model presented as a transformational leadership style. However, as explained in previous theories, all leaders will not be only transformational or transactional in their leadership style. However, leaders should portray more of the transformational ways of leading and less of the transactional ones according to Bass and Avolio (1994). In line with this research, the leaders seemed to practice a mix of laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational leadership styles in the hybrid setting. However, the leaders in this study seem to be very aware of the transformational leadership type and express that this is the leadership style they aspire to practice. In general, the leaders seemed aware of both their positive and negative traits, and as shown in Table 3 and Table 4, the respondents seemed to practice leadership “as they preached” in many ways. This aligns with what is emphasized by Itzkovich et al. (2020) regarding the importance of awareness of leaders to address issues and prevent negative consequences from impacting individuals, teams and organizational performance. Furthermore, the importance of leaders' continued work to recognize negative leadership traits from occurring. (Itzkovich et al., 2020)

The laissez-faire leadership style can be found in some elements, such as the hands-off approach that some leaders express. Trust in employees, a high level of autonomy or “self-leadership” from them, freedom to make decisions regarding their own work, and no strict control or low levels of reporting requirements align with the laissez-faire leadership style. However, these factors do not by no means have to be negative for the employees, but might rather be a cultural way of work and rewards for previous good performance from the employees. Furthermore, several of the interviewees expressed how they expect the employees to express their own needs of feedback, communication, growth, and development, in contrast to expecting the leader to guide them in their growth, further suggests a more inactive style of leading the group, i.e., more laissez-faire (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Although laissez-faire often is described as negative and as a leadership style that tends to be unsympathetic to employee needs and lacks engagement in literature (Bass & Avolio, 1994), an alternative perspective is that this style of leadership, or lack thereof, could have a different meaning in a hybrid setting, where a hands-on leadership is more difficult to provide due to the physical distance (Gross, 2018). Moreover, according to Gross (2018), the Laissez-faire leadership style is linked with innovativeness and entrepreneurial spirit, where the absence of apparent leadership can provide a setting where the team becomes more innovative in their behavior through the freedom the lack of leadership provides. On this note, Gross (2018) explains that the hands-off leadership style laissez-faire can be successful in remote

settings if the team members are proficient and experienced, where creativity and innovative behavior are fostered through working freedom. Hence, the context and the type of team will navigate the effects of this type of leadership.

All interviewees perceived feedback as more difficult to execute since hybrid communication is less clear and frequent than on-site communication. This difficulty could push the leaders down the ladder from operating in a transactional style to having a laissez-faire approach in their leadership, solely due to barriers and challenges of hybrid works and time constraints or limited engagement. The above-mentioned expectations that the employees express their own needs of feedback, communication, growth, and development, in contrast to expecting that the leader guides them in their growth further, could imply a transactional approach to leadership as well. This could be connected to the transactional leadership style in terms of feedback and support as tangible rewards or punishments that are given in exchange for the efforts and contributions provided by the employees (Bass & Avolio, 1994, 1994; Gross, 2018). According to Bass et al. (2003) and Burke et al. (2006), contingent reward has been linked with employee commitment and providing subordinate feedback to employees. However, the respondents describe how feedback can be more difficult to implement and less frequent in practice during a hybrid work setting, where it, once again, requires more planning and less spontaneity; hence, the hybrid setting could hinder the actual execution of transactional leadership, even if the intention exists from the leader.

However, company policies, set targets, and practices from above in the organization can explain many transactional behaviors. The organization develops new practices of hybrid work and provides guidelines for the leaders and employees to follow. Hence, the leaders are in many ways required to act in a transactional leadership style to maintain their role. An example is how salaries are affected by accomplishments, other evaluations, or the required administration of the employees. In this study, none of the interviewees expressed their own need for control or micro-managing, but all rather expressed trust in their employee's honesty and autonomy. This goes in line with the ideas of Gross (2018), who found that the transactional style of leadership could be necessary with the dimensions of coordination, where he found a positive relationship; where he further explains that the transactional style of leadership influences tasks, task communication, and task completion. This further aligns with the theories from Gross (2018), who states that the transactional leadership style can therefore be suited for teams requiring structure and order and creating productive results short term due to its strong link between the performance of employees and rewards. However, leaders must consider that the transactional leadership style can simultaneously hinder employee motivation and engagement, limit innovative and creative thinking, and negatively impact long-term team performance (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Gross, 2018).

As previously mentioned, the transformational leadership style is considered the optimal leadership style of motivation and inspiration (Bass & Avolio, 1994), and furthermore, the most important one in terms of leadership during remote work (Gross, 2018). The mentioned leadership styles above defined as laissez-faire could also be associated with the transformational style, i.e., high level of autonomy or “self-leadership” from the employees, freedom to make decisions regarding their own work, and no strict control or low levels of reporting. The difference would merely be the underlying factors; if the leader is “hands-off” due to lack of engagement and effort or if it is due to a high level of trust and encouragement of autonomy in the team. Gross (2018) found that the transformational leadership style could be necessary with the dimensions of trust and goal clarity, where he found a positive relationship. In line with the literature, the respondents described the transformational leadership style as necessary when it comes to maintaining relational matters in the hybrid setting, fostering inspiration and motivation, and engaging the team in participating in the shared vision and goals among the team. (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Gross, 2018)

Moreover, the respondents reported difficulties seeing needs remotely. However, they expressed how they try to communicate with employees to get the right picture of needs and motivate them in their hybrid work. This suggests a transformational approach that aligns with *‘Inspirational Motivation’* in The full-range leadership model (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Furthermore, the respondents described how they are still trying to find ways to facilitate hybrid communication and feedback, which aligns with *‘Individual Consideration’* in The full-range leadership model (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The empirical findings suggested that the communicative and relational focus of the leaders further suggest that they approach leadership in a transformational way. This goes in line with the research from Gross (2018), which means that a transformational leadership style has tendencies to create, build, and sustain strong relationships in virtual settings. Furthermore, the responsiveness of employee needs and willingness to take in feedback, try to understand, adapt, and evolve in their leadership to meet individual perspectives and expectations.

Continued opportunities were further discussed, where the provision of skill development to motivate, empower and assist the employees in reaching their full potential further goes in line with the transformational style, and more specifically, *‘Intellectual Stimulation’* in The full range leadership model (Bass & Avolio, 1994). This further aligns with the theories of Gross (2018), who means that a transformational style fosters networking structures, provides vision and goal sharing, and fosters intellectual stimulation among employees.

No apparent connection was found with the last I, *‘Idealized Influence’*, in the transformational leadership style according to the Full Range Leadership model found in the interviews. However, this does not imply that none of the interviewed leaders practice this type of leadership, but merely that it

can be hard to state by themselves that they serve as role models, are trusted and respected by the team, and behave ethically and socially desirable. The reasoning behind this is that it could come off as quite flaunting, and it is challenging to have this awareness of how others view themselves.

In general, the respondents were aware of many of the above-mentioned leadership styles and practices, many of which were practiced by the leaders. It was apparent that none of the leaders identified fully with one leadership style, but rather a mix was the norm, in line with the theory from Bass and Avolio (1994). However, differences could be found in the mix, where some leaders leaned more toward the Transformational style and some toward the more Transactional style. No one of the respondents reported or appeared to be mostly practicing laissez-faire; however, when describing own actions and behaviors, this was not very surprising when describing your actions and behaviors. For example, some of the respondents may have considered practicing laissez-faire leadership in the view of their employees. Furthermore, even though transformational leadership was expressed and explained to a large extent, it is hard to tell if their teams perceive their leadership as transformational. The mediators' trust in the leader, employee proficiency, and team maturity all seemed to favor leaders in these examples since the respondents were sampled based on high-proficiency employees and mature teams. The trust parameter, however, is difficult to evaluate here due to the lack of interviews with the employees.

6. Conclusions

The Conclusions chapter highlights the study's essential findings by answering the two research questions. Moreover, the contributions and implications of the study are presented, and finally, recommendations for future research are discussed.

This thesis is based on a literature review of hybrid work and leadership styles and eight semi-structured interviews with respondents leading hybrid teams. The study aimed to examine the challenges and opportunities related to leadership in hybrid settings. Through the interviews, this study gathered insights into different leadership styles practiced by leaders of hybrid teams. The study had the following sub-objectives; 1. To provide a comprehensive review of leadership styles practiced in hybrid settings, and 2. To develop a framework for effective leadership styles in leading successful hybrid teams. Consequently, two research questions were formulated for the study, answered below.

R1: What are the challenges and opportunities associated with leading hybrid teams?

According to the study, a generally positive view by the leaders and their teams was described in terms of the hybrid work setting. The results show that the leaders apprehend that the employees value the flexibility and work-life balance of working in a hybrid environment. The teams were further described as motivated and productive when given the option of where and how they worked, along with other benefits like a richer social life and shorter commute times. However, due to a lack of social interaction and team cohesion, all respondents prefer the hybrid format rather than a fully remote one, and they further expressed how some employees preferred to work from the office full time despite the opportunity to work from home.

The hybrid work environments were accompanied by less frequent and clear communication, further described as making it harder to execute feedback. Due to this, feedback and communication required more planning from the leaders. Planned input, however, might result in a positive effect with more equal treatment of the employees. The respondents described how they continually seek effective ways to foster hybrid communication, which was described as the biggest challenge of the hybrid setting. Employee autonomy and self-leadership were emphasized, and having high trust in employees was reported by all the respondents as a prerequisite for effective hybrid work. Furthermore, the study emphasized how crucial it is for organizations to support employees in their hybrid work by offering guidelines and improving working conditions at home offices. The respondents described an important need for constant adaptation to improve working methods with new tools, technology, and policies and technological proficiency to facilitate communication and collaboration through the hybrid channel.

Lastly, the organization needs to be adaptable and leverage digital tools to foster the development of hybrid work and combat the challenges that the hybrid setting presents.

R2: How can leaders adapt their leadership style to lead hybrid teams successfully?

In terms of hybrid leadership, it was concluded that leaders must adapt to the shifting conditions and exercise leadership in various contexts. The study's findings emphasize the necessity of flexible leadership and transparent communication in hybrid work situations. The study further demonstrates that individualized leadership is necessary to satisfy the demands of each employee and that leadership must be iteratively adapted to sustain well-being and group cohesion in the hybrid team. The expectation of leaders is somewhat described as more socially coordinated in the hybrid setting, which requires more effort and individualized, clear, and frequent communication with the team members. Concluded, flexible and responsive leadership, individualized consideration, trust-building and clear and transparent communication are essential in the hybrid setting.

In terms of leadership styles in the hybrid setting, the transformational leadership style was found important in terms of effective communication skills, relational skills, empathy, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and flexibility as a leader. Furthermore, in terms of how leaders must recognize and address every team member's particular requirements and difficulties of every team member on an individual level, which requires more effort in hybrid settings. This was explained due to our individual needs, less visibility, different ways of working, and to prevent any inequality and dispersity in the team. Furthermore, trust-building is important to reach through as a leader and build a strong foundation between the leader, employees, and the team. Hence, to promote a feeling of shared purpose and collaboration, leaders need to build trust with every team member, regardless if they are on-site or remotely located or what function they play, which is recognized as transformational leadership. The four I:s of transformational leadership, Individualized consideration, Intellectual stimulation, Inspirational motivation, and Idealized influence, all seem to be important in the hybrid setting since they hold all of the above-described characteristics. Moreover, the transactional leadership style was also shown to be needed in the hybrid setting, in terms of performance management and goal setting, to set clear expectations and goals for the hybrid teams. Furthermore, evaluation, feedback sessions, and continuous support are important for the success of hybrid work. Lastly, some elements of the laissez-faire style were found important in the research fostering innovativeness, creativity, freedom, and an entrepreneurial spirit in the hybrid teams. However, this requires the hybrid team to be professional and experienced enough to handle this work freely. Furthermore, this leadership style requires high level of trust between the leader and the team to succeed in hybrid settings. Concluded regarding leadership styles is that leaders need to understand their organizations' context of hybrid work and how they successfully can balance elements from the different leadership styles, such as

relational and motivational transformational traits with planning and coordination transactional traits and lastly to inherit the possible creative and innovative outcomes from the laissez-faire style.

What was somewhat neglected in previous research in the area of leadership in remote settings was that, according to several respondents, leadership in hybrid work was more time-consuming, stressful, and difficult than on-site employment. The lack of visibility in hybrid work environments might put extra strain on leaders because staff members occasionally assume they will always be present. The respondents' perception was that the lack of visibility due to the hybrid work setting affects both the employees and the leaders, giving the possible impression that leaders are always available. The literature review, which mostly concentrated on employee experiences and how leaders may facilitate their work, did not address this issue in particular but merely stressed how transformational leadership could be more time-consuming. Hence, leaders that practice high levels of transformational leadership might succeed in their hybrid leadership while negatively affecting their work-life balance and job satisfaction. Consequently, finding a balanced way of leading hybrid teams while retaining the leader's health is crucial.

Concluded, this study has emphasized the importance for leaders and organizations to recognize the unique challenges and opportunities associated with leading hybrid teams and how to adapt leadership and strategies specifically tailored to align with the hybrid work environment. Adapting a leadership style to be efficient in leading hybrid teams could imply organizational success in hybrid team environments. The ideas of Bass & Avolio (1994) and Gross (2018) regarding how leaders present a mix of different leadership styles are apparent, with an emphasis on how the transformational styles of leadership seem to be considered most important by the interviewees and the things that they all try to develop to become better leaders in hybrid settings. This further aligns with Gross' (2018) findings of how transformational leadership styles have positive relationships with the presented dimensions and of the effectiveness of remote teams in his research, where relational, inspirational, and motivational leadership efforts combined with a supportive culture that provided employees with the tools that they needed to succeed in remote work environments.

6.1 Implications of Study & Contribution to Research

The contributions generated by this thesis are literary, empirical, societal as well as methodological. Firstly, the research has literary, empirical and societal contributions due to its examination of an existing gap in organizational research, where leadership style and its impact on hybrid teams have been examined and shown to have important and interesting implications. The study contributes to leadership knowledge in hybrid settings by understanding how leadership styles relate to hybrid team

success. Previous studies have researched the connection between leadership styles in normal working conditions and fully remote teams. This study extends this research by strengthening the belief that there is an apparent connection between leadership styles and the successful management of hybrid teams. The research offers a more extensive understanding of leadership styles in the context of successful hybrid work in organizations. A recognition of the relevance of the traits of leaders in different contexts can assist organizations in the education and development of their leaders to be adaptable in their leadership style to increase the chances of successful leaders for their specific hybrid context. This study shows that leadership in hybrid settings requires a mix of leadership styles. Even though the transformational leadership style is important and the most appreciated, hybrid teams will also need transactional leadership traits for structure and coordination and even a laissez-faire style to foster innovation and creativity. These findings are essential because the general leadership literature suggests that some leadership styles are preferred. In line with the ideas of Avolio & Bass (1994), a mix is not only normal but also what should be the norm in hybrid settings. Furthermore, as Antonakis & Avolio (2003) suggest, it is of utmost importance to consider the context, such as the team, employees, and type of work, to understand what mix of leadership styles is preferred in each situation and setting.

Secondly, this research has further addressed the importance of employee job satisfaction in hybrid settings, where leaders and organizations need to understand the challenges with hybrid settings to implement strategies that fit the context of their hybrid team. In line with the purpose of the study, it highlights the importance for organizations and leaders to understand the opportunities and challenges associated with hybrid work and the importance of adaptation and flexibility in their leadership style to lead hybrid employees successfully. Organizations and leaders that understand the unique challenges and opportunities of their hybrid teams will likely have a better foundation for creating a work environment that is more conducive and supportive. In line with the purpose of the study, it highlights the importance for organizations and leaders to understand the opportunities and challenges associated with hybrid work and the importance of adaptation and flexibility in their leadership style to lead hybrid employees successfully with high employee satisfaction.

Thirdly, the developed theoretical framework based on previous studies, Figure 3, provides a methodological contribution since it could be used as a tool in organizations to understand better practices or contribute to further research in the area.

Lastly, this study emphasizes a neglected view of the situations for leaders in the hybrid work environment. Although a generally positive view, hybrid leadership was described as more time-consuming, stressful, and difficult than on-site leadership. The challenges included the feeling that the lack of visibility promoted by hybrid work goes both ways, creating a false sense of leader availability at all times. Secondly, the study has methodological contributions through the development

of a new theoretical framework building on previous research and confirmed by the empirical findings in this study, connecting leadership styles to effectiveness in hybrid work settings. The framework can work as a road map for leaders to understand how their approaches to leadership could affect their hybrid team in conjunction with the context of the setting. Lastly, a societal contribution is provided due to how the study addresses leadership in hybrid work settings since this widespread phenomenon affects many working-age people. Hence, understanding how to lead and work efficiently in hybrid settings is of utmost importance for public health, governmental policies, and societal success.

The practical implications of these contributions cover the possible development of frameworks, policies, guidelines and organizational support in facilitating the hybrid work and the leadership thereof and fostering collaboration and communication in the organization. Understanding the best practices for managing hybrid teams is essential not only for leaders but further for organizations, trade unions, governments, and policymakers. This thesis has contributed to the knowledge base regarding leadership in hybrid settings. This knowledge could provide practical guidance to successfully lead hybrid teams by addressing apparent challenges and opportunities, which promotes employee job satisfaction and organizational success.

6.2 Suggestions for further studies

In this study, most interviewees viewed the hybrid form of work as beneficial and emphasized how it is appreciated by most employees and supported and encouraged by all levels in the organization. Furthermore, they anticipated a future in which work is done remotely to a greater extent due to its wide acceptance and appreciation among most people. Since hybrid work is the new normal for a vast amount of organizations globally, there is a great need for studies to be done on a larger scale and in a wide variety of companies to achieve conclusions that are more generally applicable to understanding our new digital reality. The traditional “social contracts” of work between organizations and their employees are being rewritten, emphasizing the newfound autonomy and flexibility. The dynamic nature of organizations and society requires constant adjustment from both an individual and organizational perspective. It is fair to believe that it is of great importance for companies to conduct internal research and audit on how their organizations’ transition to hybrid work has affected their employees and the organization as a whole. Organizations must explore how to maintain networking, social life, and effective communication while not standing in the way of optimal efficiency. Another interesting view is the leadership perspective in hybrid settings, focusing on leadership challenges regarding their well-being and workload rather than the view of the employees.

Further suggestions are to conduct more large-scale studies in this area, comparing industries, gender, and age, and where the study takes place over a more extended period to understand the long-term

effects on organizations, society, and individuals. What are the long-term effects of the different leadership styles on the engagement and motivation of hybrid teams and the organizational outcomes thereof? What will hybrid work look like in the future in terms of isolation and health issues, work-from-home regulations, the perspective of leaders, AI, future digitalization, and so forth? Furthermore, how are corporate or societal culture and inclusivity changing in response to new working methods, and how are organizations keeping employees connected and engaged, regardless of work location? Lastly, how managers could and should become more proactive in new work environments and how the hybrid work models should be designed and measured for success.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Optimal and suboptimal leadership styles visualized in the 'The Full Range Leadership Model'

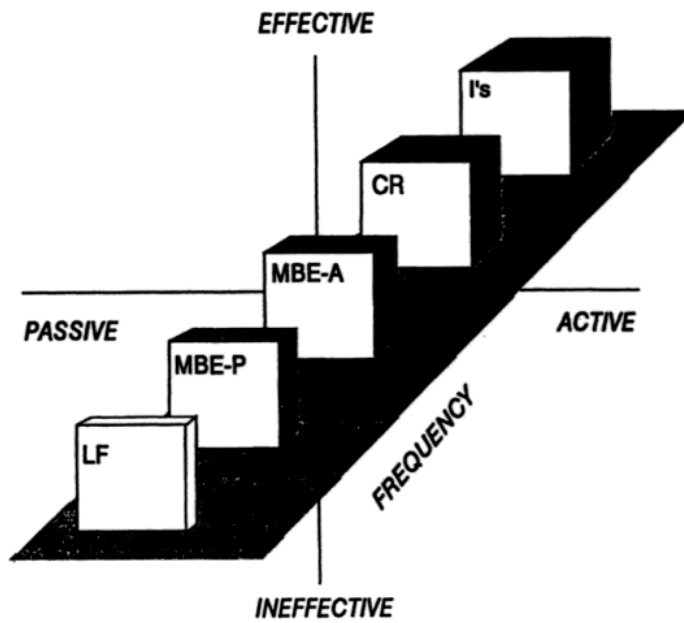


Figure 1.1 Optimal Profile

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IMPROVING ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

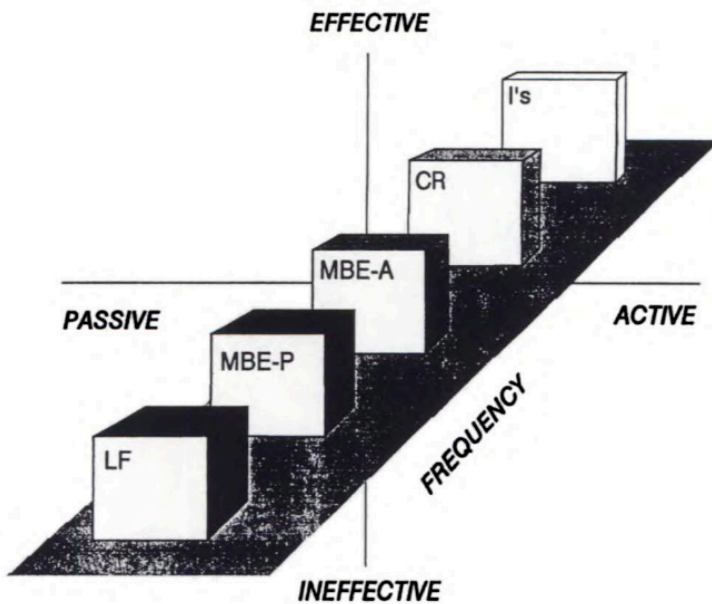
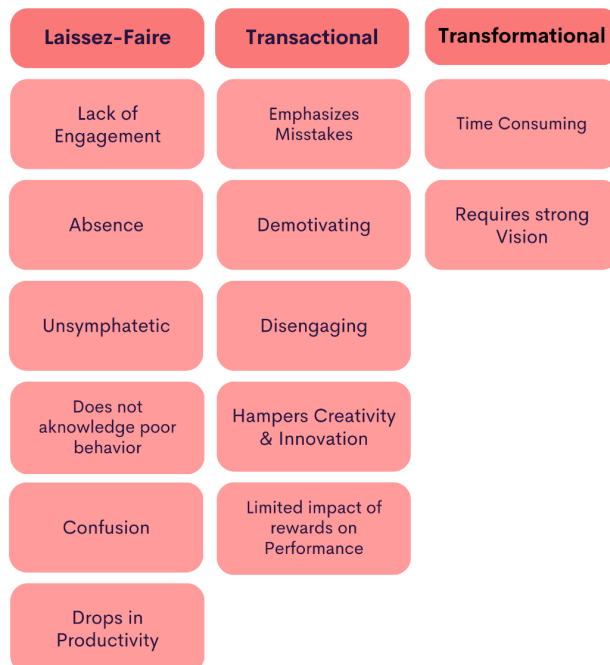
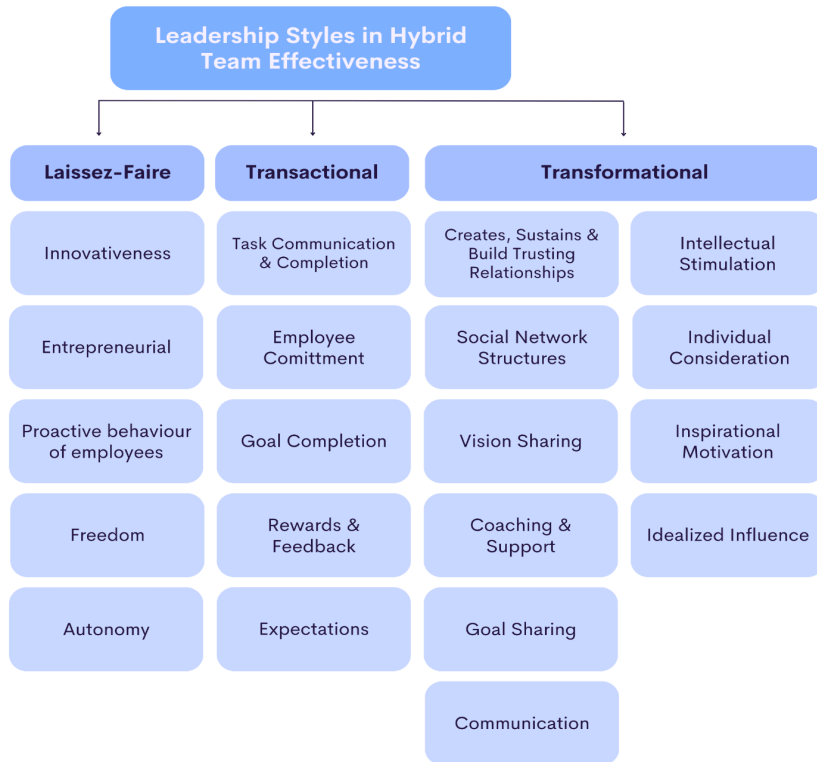


Figure 1.2 Suboptimal Profile

Optimal and Suboptimal leadership styles are visualized in the 'The Full Range Leadership Model' (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

APPENDIX B: Mind Maps Reasoning behind the development of the Theoretical Framework.



APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Formalities

Information on participation, anonymization, and further consent to record the interview.
Introduction of the study.

Background

1. Can you describe the organization you work for and your role in the company?
 - a. How long have you worked for the company?
 - b. How long have you held your current leadership position?
 - c. How many people are in the company, and how many do you manage?
-

Leadership

2. What does leadership mean to you?
 - a. How would you describe a good leader?
 3. How would you describe your leadership?
 - a. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a leader?
 4. How do you think your employees perceive your leadership in the office and remotely?
 5. Describe your relationship with your employees.
-

Hybrid work

6. What guidelines does your organization have for hybrid work today?
7. What inspired your company to consider the possibility of telework?
8. How has your company dealt with the cultural and organizational challenges resulting from the transition to telework?
9. How does communication during telework differ from that at the office?
10. Do you notice any differences in employee performance when working remotely?
11. Based on your experience, what advice would you give to other organizations and leaders trying to implement this kind of digital transformation to hybrid work?

Leadership - Hybrid settings

12. How would you say that hybrid work has affected your leadership?
13. What challenges have you faced as a leader due to hybrid leadership?
14. How do you motivate and engage your team remotely?
15. Have you been given the right conditions by the company to exercise the leadership you want to do remotely?
16. Have you or the organization made any extra efforts to maintain the social interaction of the group or the corporate culture when working remotely?
17. Have you introduced specific policies or practices to support hybrid working?
18. How have you managed the work-life balance as a leader when working remotely?
 - a. How do the employees seem to deal with this?
19. What advice would you give leaders new to managing hybrid teams?
20. Would you prefer returning to office-based work or continuing hybrid work?
 - a. Has this changed (during the pandemic/after the pandemic)?
 - b. What is the general opinion of employees on this?

Conclude the interview.

Is there anything else that comes to mind regarding the topic you would like to share?

Final comments and summary of how the study will continue.

Thank the respondent for the interview.