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**Leadership and Communication in Remote
Engineering Consulting: A Case Study on Manager-
Consultant Relationships**

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ABSTRACT:

Remote and hybrid work have increased significantly in recent years, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, which has substantially transformed organizational leadership and communication practices. Especially in expert and consulting work, the physical dispersion of work, client-oriented operating models, and reduced face-to-face interaction create new challenges for supervisor–subordinate relationships and internal organizational cohesion. This study examines the role of leadership and communication in a remote and client-oriented engineering consulting organization.

The aim of the study was to identify the communication tools and practices used by supervisors and employees in their collaboration and to explore how supervisors can support social cohesion and a sense of belonging in the context of remote and client-based work. The research was conducted as a case study using a mixed-method approach. The data consisted of semi-structured interviews with supervisors and the results of an employee satisfaction and engagement survey conducted by the organization in February 2025. The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, and the survey data were examined descriptively as part of the triangulation of qualitative findings.

The results indicate that daily communication between supervisors and employees was generally perceived as effective and relied primarily on digital channels such as Teams meetings, phone calls, and instant messaging. Supervisors were considered supportive and approachable; however, regular feedback, systematic monitoring of work, and participatory interaction were identified as areas for development. The results of the employee survey showed that employees were motivated and committed to their work but experienced a weaker connection to the organization as a whole. In particular, internal communication from management and strategic clarity were evaluated as weaker compared to other areas.

The study demonstrates that in remote and client-oriented consulting work, the role of leadership is emphasized especially through intentional and proactive communication, feedback, and practices that support a sense of community. Maintaining social cohesion requires supervisors to consciously invest in interaction, visibility, and actions that strengthen employees' connection to the organization. The study provides practical insights for the development of supervisory practices and contributes to previous research by examining leadership in an established remote and client-oriented work context.

KEYWORDS: remote work, leadership, communication, social cohesion, consulting work, employee engagement, job satisfaction, leader-member exchange (LMX)

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TIIVISTELMÄ:

Etä- ja hybridityö ovat yleistyneet merkittävästi viime vuosina, erityisesti COVID-19-pandemian jälkeen, mikä on muuttanut olennaisesti organisaatioiden johtamis- ja viestintäkäytäntöjä. Erityisesti asiantuntija- ja konsultointityössä työn fyysinen hajautuminen, asiakaslähtöinen toimintamalli sekä vähentynyt kasvokkainen vuorovaikutus asettavat uusia haasteita esihenkilö-alais-suhteille ja organisaation sisäiselle koheesiolle. Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin johtajuuden ja viestinnän merkitystä etä- ja asiakaslähtöisessä insinööri-konsultointiyrityksessä.

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, millaisia viestintävälineitä ja -käytäntöjä esihenkilöt ja alaiset hyödyntävät yhteistyössä sekä miten esihenkilöt voivat tukea sosiaalisen koheesion ja yhteenkuuluvuuden kokemusta etä- ja asiakastyön kontekstissa. Tutkimus toteutettiin tapaustutkimuksena hyödyntäen monimenetelmällistä lähestymistapaa. Aineisto koostui puolistrukturoiduista esihenkilöhaastatteluista sekä organisaation helmikuussa 2025 toteutetun työtyytyväisyys- ja sitoutumiskyselyn tuloksista. Haastatteluaineisto analysoitiin temaattisen analyysin avulla, ja kyselyaineistoa tarkasteltiin kuvailevasti osana laadullisten havaintojen triangulaatiota.

Tulosten perusteella esihenkilöiden ja alaisten välinen päivittäinen viestintä koettiin pääosin toimivaksi ja perustui pääasiassa digitaalisiin kanaviin, kuten Teams-kokouksiin, puheluihin ja pikaviesteihin. Esihenkilöt koettiin tukeviksi ja helposti lähestyttäväksi, mutta säännöllinen palaute, työn systemaattinen seuranta sekä osallistava vuorovaikutus osoittautuivat kehittämiskohteiksi. Työtyytyväisyyskyselyn tulokset osoittivat työntekijöiden olevan motivoituneita ja sitoutuneita omaan työhönsä, mutta kokevan heikomman yhteyden organisaatioon kokonaisuutena. Erityisesti johdon sisäinen viestintä ja strateginen selkeys arvioitiin yleisesti muita osa-alueita heikommiksi.

Tutkimus osoittaa, että etä- ja asiakaslähtöisessä konsultointityössä johtajuuden merkitys korostuu erityisesti tarkoituksellisen ja ennakoivan viestinnän, palautteen sekä yhteisöllisyyttä tukevien käytäntöjen kautta. Sosiaalisen koheesion ylläpitäminen edellyttää esihenkilöiltä tietoista panostusta vuorovaikutukseen, näkyvyyteen ja organisaatioon kiinnittymistä tukeviin toimiin. Tutkimus tarjoaa käytännönläheisiä näkökulmia esihenkilötyön kehittämiseen ja täydentää aiempaa tutkimusta tarkastelemalla johtajuutta etätyön vakiintuneessa, asiakaslähtöisessä kontekstissa.

AVAINSANAT: remote work, leadership, communication, social cohesion, consulting work, employee engagement, job satisfaction, leader-member exchange (LMX)

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1 Introduction

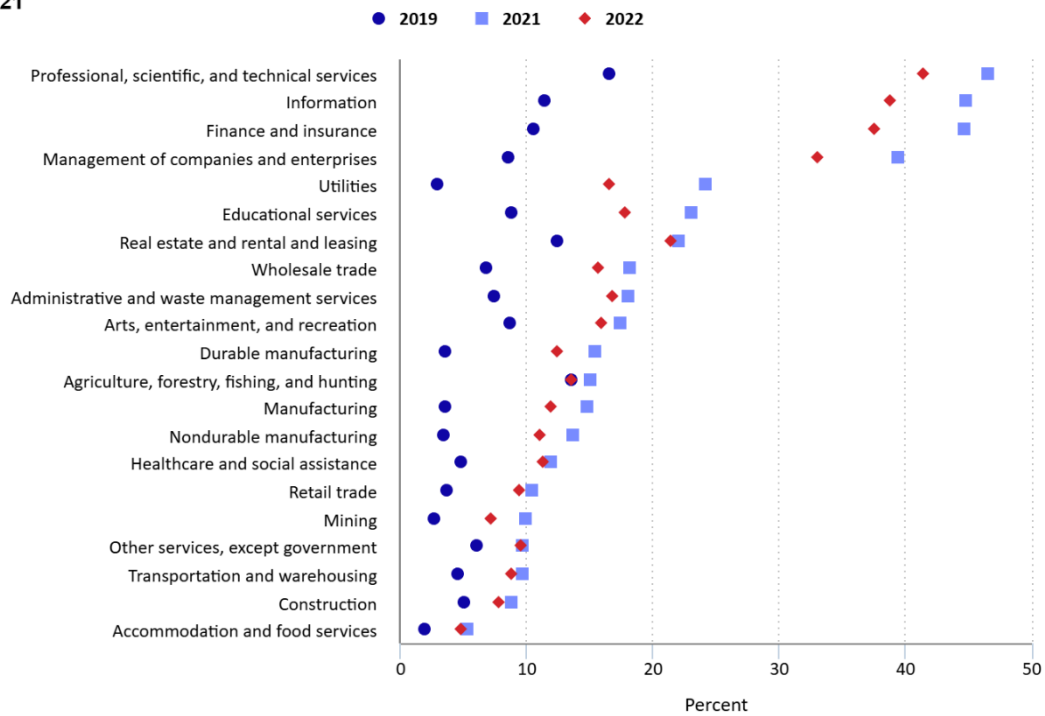
1.1 Research gap

The prevalence of remote work has increased dramatically in recent years, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated a large-scale shift toward virtual and hybrid work arrangements.

Prior to 2020, remote work was typically adopted in limited forms, but the pandemic triggered a structural transformation in how organisations coordinate work and communicate (Bartik et al., 2020). Systematic reviews conducted after the pandemic further demonstrate that remote work has become a sustained and widespread practice globally, reshaping patterns of collaboration, team interaction, and managerial responsibilities (Wells et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2021). Researchers note that this expansion of remote work has created new challenges in leadership, employee well-being, and organisational cohesion, particularly as managers navigate diminished face-to-face contact and increased reliance on digital communication tools (Xiao et al., 2021).

Given these developments, there is a clear need for more research examining how managerial communication and social cohesion function in remote and client-oriented work environments. This makes the present study both timely and relevant, as it contributes empirical insight into leadership and communication practices within a post-pandemic organisational landscape.

Chart 1. Percent of remote workers by major industry group, ranked from largest to smallest in 2021



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.



Figure 1. Share of remote workers by industry group 2019-2022. (adapted from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024).

1.2 Case company and background of the study

The case company examined in this study is a technology and engineering consulting organization operating in Finland as part of a large international group. The Finnish unit employs close to 500 professionals over several cities in Finland.

The company provides consulting services across various industrial sectors, including manufacturing, defense, security, as well as software and information technology solutions. Its services cover the whole product development lifecycle from concept design and engineering to system integration and project management. Consultants often work on-site with clients as part of multidisciplinary project teams, enabling close collaboration and a customer-oriented approach.

The goal was to study the current situation with communication and employee satisfaction. Vision was to make action plan in order to improve the inner cohesion of the team, because of the nature of consultant work. Continuous remote work and the distance between the team members and managers set a difficult environment for efficient and approachable leader-subordinate relationship.

1.3 Research questions and objectives of the study

The primary aim of this study is to explore and understand the dynamics of the relationship between managers and consultants within a consulting organization, particularly in the context of remote and client-based work. The research focuses on how leadership communication, trust, and social practices influence consultants' identification with their employer organization and their overall sense of belonging. By applying the theoretical frameworks of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and social cohesion, this study seeks to provide both theoretical insight and practical recommendations to improve leadership effectiveness and employee well-being in consulting firms.

The research is motivated by the growing need to maintain strong organizational ties in increasingly flexible and decentralized work environments. As consultants frequently operate at client sites or remotely, their daily interactions with their home organization become limited, potentially weakening their emotional and professional connection to it. Understanding how managerial behaviour and communication methods can mitigate this detachment is therefore essential for sustaining motivation, commitment, and cohesion.

The research questions are:

1. What communication tools and means are currently being utilized by managers and subordinates for effective collaboration, and how satisfied are they with the current situation?
2. How can managers improve social cohesion among their subordinates in a remote and client-oriented work setting?

To address the issues, this study pursues the following research objectives:

- To identify and analyze the current communication tools and methods used by managers and consultants for collaboration and relationship maintenance in a remote and client-oriented work environment.
- To assess the quality and perceived adequacy of these interactions from a managerial perspective, examining satisfaction levels and potential areas for improvement.
- To provide practical recommendations for the case firm on how to improve leadership communication and organizational practices that promote well-being and unity among remote consultants.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters: The first chapter is an introduction chapter, which includes research gap, research questions, objectives and the structure of the study.

The second chapter presents the theoretical foundation of the study by examining three key conceptual areas: Leader-Member Exchange (LMX), engineering management, and leadership in remote work. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive basis for understanding how leadership relationships and management practices influence consultants' sense of belonging and organizational identification in a remote and client-oriented work environment.

The third chapter, about the study's methodology, outlines the research design, data collection, and analysis methods used to investigate the relationship between managers and consultants within a consulting organization. The focus of this research is to understand how managers perceive communication practices, leadership challenges, and the means of fostering cohesion and organizational identity among consultants who work remotely or at client sites. Accordingly, the study adopts a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews with managers.

The fourth chapter presents and analyses the empirical results. It reports the findings from manager interviews, identifying key themes, similarities, and differences across groups. The analysis focuses on communication practices, leadership relationships, and consultants' sense of belonging, as viewed through the lens of LMX theory and social cohesion.

Finally, the fifth chapter summarizes the key findings and conclusions of the study, evaluates the research and its limitations, and discusses suggestions for future research.

Table 1. Structure of the thesis

Chapter Title	Content
1 Introduction	Presents the background, research gap, case company context, research questions, objectives, and overall structure of the thesis.
2 Literature review	Reviews theoretical foundations related to engineering management, remote leadership, leader–member exchange (LMX), and social cohesion in remote and consulting contexts.
3 Methodology	Describes the case study design, research setting, data collection through semi-structured manager interviews and employee survey, and data analysis procedures.

Chapter Title		Content
4	Results	Presents and analyses the empirical findings from interviews and survey data, focusing on communication practices, leadership relationships, and social cohesion in remote consulting work.
5	Conclusions	Summarizes key findings, discusses theoretical and practical implications, evaluates limitations, and provides suggestions for future research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Engineering management

In the research literature, engineering management commonly refers to managerial activity in technologically intensive settings, where engineering work forms the core of organizational value creation. Rather than focusing solely on administrative coordination, the concept emphasizes integrating technical expertise with managerial responsibility, particularly in environments with complex systems, innovation, and uncertainty (Badiru, 2014). Engineering management is therefore most frequently discussed in connection with sectors such as manufacturing, construction, information technology, and product development, where technical and managerial decisions are closely interdependent.

A recurring theme in studies of engineering management is its positioning between engineering disciplines and management science. Scholars highlight that the field adopts an analytical and system-oriented mode of reasoning, reflecting its engineering roots, while simultaneously addressing organizational challenges typically associated with management (Koontz & Weihrich, 2010). This dual orientation distinguishes engineering management from general management approaches, as it places stronger emphasis on the coordination of technical processes, the allocation of specialized resources, and the management of interdependencies across engineering tasks. At the same time, the literature recognizes that these technical concerns cannot be separated from social and organizational dynamics.

Much of the theoretical grounding of engineering management can be traced to classical management ideas, though these ideas are reshaped by the conditions under which engineering work is carried out. The managerial functions articulated by Fayol continue to inform discussions of how technical activities are structured and controlled, but their relevance lies in their adaptation to project-based and multidisciplinary work environments rather than in their original formulation (Fayol, 1916). In parallel, systems thinking has become a prominent lens through which engineering management is

examined, as it provides a way to conceptualize engineering projects and organizations as interconnected wholes composed of technical, human, and organizational elements (Checkland, 1981).

Another strand of the literature focuses on the nature of managerial decision-making in engineering contexts. Because engineering managers often operate under conditions of incomplete information and competing constraints, decision-making is frequently supported by formal analytical methods. These include optimization techniques, economic evaluation, and risk analysis, which are used to compare alternatives and assess trade-offs (Clemen & Reilly, 2013, pp. 3-7). However, empirical and conceptual research alike underline that such methods do not replace managerial judgment; instead, they coexist with interpretive skills, communication, and leadership capabilities that are necessary for navigating expert-driven organizational settings (Kerzner, 2017).

Discussions of engineering management also frequently intersect with project management research, reflecting the fact that engineering work is often organized around temporary, goal-oriented initiatives. Frameworks developed within project management offer structured approaches to scheduling, budgeting, and performance monitoring, which are integral to managing engineering activities effectively (Project Management Institute, 2021). Nevertheless, the scope of engineering management is broader than project execution alone, encompassing longer-term concerns such as technological capability building, innovation governance, and strategic alignment between engineering functions and organizational objectives.

When examined from a leadership perspective, engineering management is characterized by a reliance on professional expertise as a source of influence. The specialized knowledge possessed by engineers limits the effectiveness of hierarchical control, thereby increasing the importance of credibility and technical understanding in managerial roles (Mintzberg, 2009). Leadership in this context involves enabling expert

work while simultaneously maintaining coordination and accountability across organizational boundaries.

In engineering consulting organizations, the application of engineering management differs from its traditional form in in-house engineering or manufacturing contexts. Whereas conventional engineering management literature typically assumes that engineers are managed within a single organizational structure through direct hierarchical relationships, consulting environments involve work arrangements that span organizational boundaries (Hobday, 2000). Engineers employed by consulting firms commonly perform project work within client organizations, which alters the distribution of managerial authority and responsibility.

In such settings, engineering management is characterized by a separation between formal employment relationships and day-to-day technical supervision. The consulting firm retains responsibility for human resource management, competence development, and career progression, while operational and technical guidance is often provided by the client organization (Cleland & Ireland, 2006). As a result, engineering management places less emphasis on direct technical control and more on coordination, resource allocation, and alignment among organizational actors.

This arrangement can be understood through the lens of matrix and project-based organizational structures, in which individuals are accountable to both internal management and external project stakeholders (Hobday, 2000). Consequently, engineering management in consulting contexts focuses on matching technical competencies to project requirements, balancing workloads across assignments, and supporting engineers across multiple client engagements.

2.2 Leadership in remote work

Today, the working culture has shifted to remote work being expected as a normal part of the job, rather than a special benefit. COVID.19 pandemic accelerated this shift within many organizations to offer wide remote and hybrid work practices (Ng, 2022). Since work becomes more scattered, leadership and communication practices must adapt to new environments where digital tools are the primary means of communication. In such settings, maintaining trust between managers and subordinates and sustaining team cohesion may become more difficult with reduced in-person interactions.

Remote management refers to managerial and supervisory practices in which managers and employees are geographically separated, and interaction occurs primarily through digital communication and collaboration technologies. The concept is closely connected to broader changes in working life, including digitalization, globalization, and the increasing spatial and temporal flexibility of work (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Although managing from a distance is not a completely new phenomenon, its significance has increased considerably with the growth of knowledge-intensive work and the widespread adoption of virtual and distributed teams. In the academic literature, remote management is often examined within the broader frameworks of virtual leadership or distributed work, both of which emphasize leadership processes that are mediated by technology rather than based on direct, face-to-face interaction (Avolio et al., 2001).

The theoretical foundations of remote management draw on established leadership and organizational behaviour theories, particularly those related to communication, trust, and performance management. From a communication perspective, leadership is understood as a social process through which shared meaning, coordination, and commitment are constructed (Järvenpää & Leidner, 1999). In remote work contexts, communication is frequently mediated and asynchronous, which places increased emphasis on clarity, structure, and deliberate communication practices. The choice of communication media is therefore consequential, as different media vary in their capacity to convey social cues and reduce ambiguity. Media richness theory suggests

that richer communication channels are better suited for complex and equivocal tasks, whereas leaner media may suffice for routine information exchange (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

Trust is consistently identified as a central element of effective remote management. Because managers have fewer opportunities for direct observation and control, leadership in remote settings relies more heavily on trust-based relationships (Mayer et al., 1995). In virtual and geographically dispersed teams, trust may develop rapidly because of perceived competence, reliability, and task performance rather than through prolonged interpersonal interaction. This form of rapidly developing trust has been described as swift trust and is considered particularly relevant in temporary or project-based remote work arrangements (Meyerson et al., 1996). The presence of trust enables coordination and reduces the need for extensive monitoring, which is often impractical in remote work environments.

Remote management can also be understood through the lens of goal-oriented and results-based management. When work is not bound to a specific location or schedule, performance evaluation tends to focus more strongly on outcomes and deliverables than on visible work processes. Management by objectives emphasizes the importance of clearly defined goals, shared expectations, and accountability, all of which are critical in remote work contexts where informal oversight is limited (Drucker, 1954). Clear goal-setting and role definitions help structure work and provide a basis for coordination across geographically dispersed teams.

Technology plays a dual role in remote management. On the one hand, digital communication and collaboration tools enable coordination and leadership across time and space; on the other hand, they may increase perceived social distance and the risk of misunderstandings. Research on e-leadership highlights that technology itself does not determine leadership effectiveness; rather, its impact depends on how it is integrated into managerial practices and organizational routines (Avolio et al., 2014).

Consequently, remote management is not solely a technological issue but a socio-technical phenomenon that emerges from the interaction between leadership practices, organizational structures, and communication technologies.

Remote management is frequently examined in relation to virtual teams, which are commonly defined as groups of individuals who work toward shared goals while being geographically, temporally, or organizationally dispersed and who rely on information and communication technologies for collaboration (Powell et al., 2004). Research indicates that leading such teams requires heightened attention to coordination mechanisms, role clarity, and shared norms in order to compensate for the lack of physical proximity (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Overall, the literature suggests that remote management does not constitute a fundamentally new form of leadership but rather represents the application and adaptation of established managerial principles to the context of digitally mediated and geographically dispersed work

2.3 COVID remote work

COVID-19 pandemic led to a greater suffering among the employees all around the world (Sibley et al., 2020). This has reflected as an undermining of trust for leaders. Moreover, in the future, similar pandemics are expected to happen increasingly. Thus, maintaining the employee well-being as high as possible during uncertain and changing times becomes critical from the businesses point of view. (Tollefson 2020)

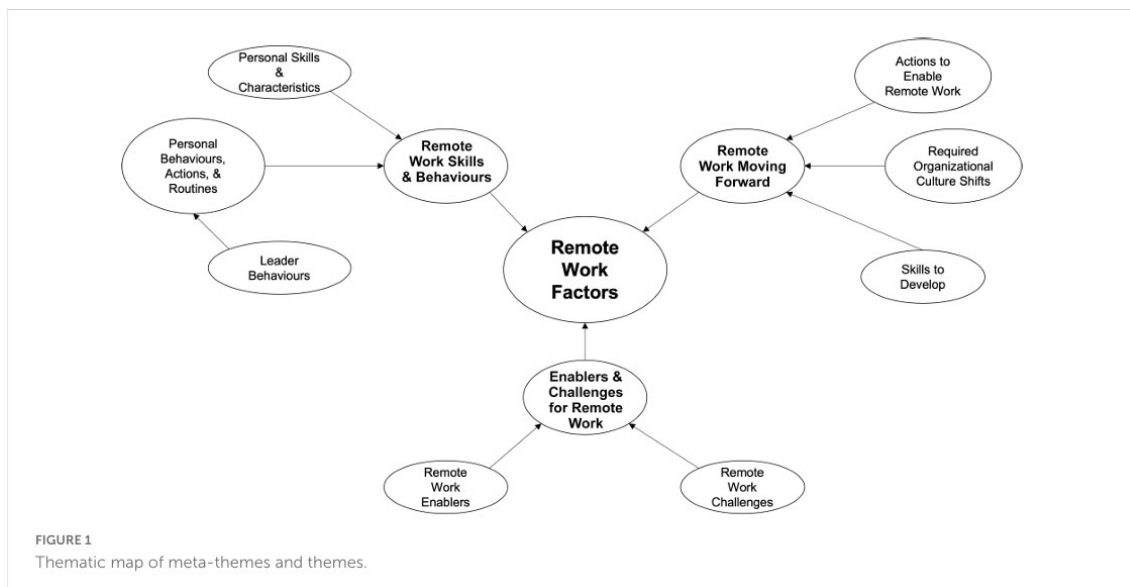


Figure 2. Thematic map of meta-themes and themes. Source: Henke et al. (2022).

2.3.1 Remote work benefits

Job autonomy and self-leadership also emerge as central resources in remote work. Galanti et al. (2021) found that autonomy and self-leadership skills enhanced both productivity and work engagement in remote contexts. Employees who had the freedom to make decisions about their schedules and work methods reported lower strain and greater motivation. Self-leadership practices, such as setting personal goals and monitoring progress, further reinforced employees' energy and dedication. Consequently, remote work can provide better opportunities for personal growth and a stronger sense of job control. Shimura et al. (2021) found that remote work also lowers stress when done in a balanced combination with in-office days by allowing flexibility while still maintaining social connections and organizational support.

2.3.2 Remote work challenges

Although remote work can have some positive effects, it also has some drawbacks. Shimura et al. (2021) found that employees working entirely from home experienced

presenteeism, indicating that they worked through illness and thus with lower productivity. Also, reduced social support and greater social isolation can negatively affect employees' mental health.

Onboarding and training new employees is difficult for managers without face-to-face interaction. But also, for newcomers specifically, it means fewer opportunities to connect and create new relationships, integrate into team culture, and seek daily casual encounters. (Henke et al. 2022)

Shirmohammadi et al. (2022) found that before the pandemic, remote work was often praised for its flexibility, allowing employees to manage their schedules and balance work and personal life more effectively. However, starting from the pandemic, this changed into work intensification. Employees experienced longer working hours, constant online availability and higher workloads which blurred the boundaries of work and free time, leading to imbalance instead of flexibility.

Also, home offices usually lack appropriate workspaces and are more exposed for facing noise and distractions. Especially with spouses and children, the productivity and focus on actual work are severely impaired (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). On top of work productivity, interruptions affect on the whole family demands. Family responsibilities can feel overwhelming, in midst of increased remote work. Interruptions lower the positive stress that is based on challenge, and increase the negative stress caused by hindrance. (Perry et al., 2023)

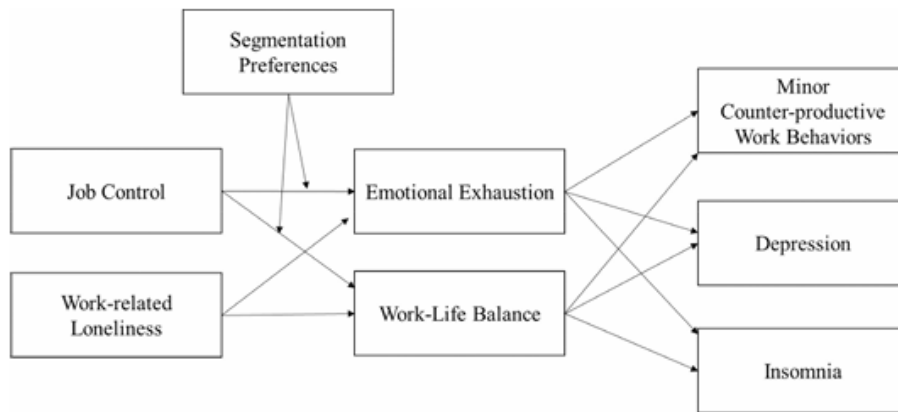


Figure 3. Proposed model (adapted from Becker et al., 2018).

2.4 Remote work success

Allen et al. (2024) found that the most important attributes for succeeding in remote work are work habit – related behaviours, such as staying focused, effective time use, and ability to work autonomously. Vizcaíno et al. (2025), claim that stress and motivation are the key factors for remote work performance:

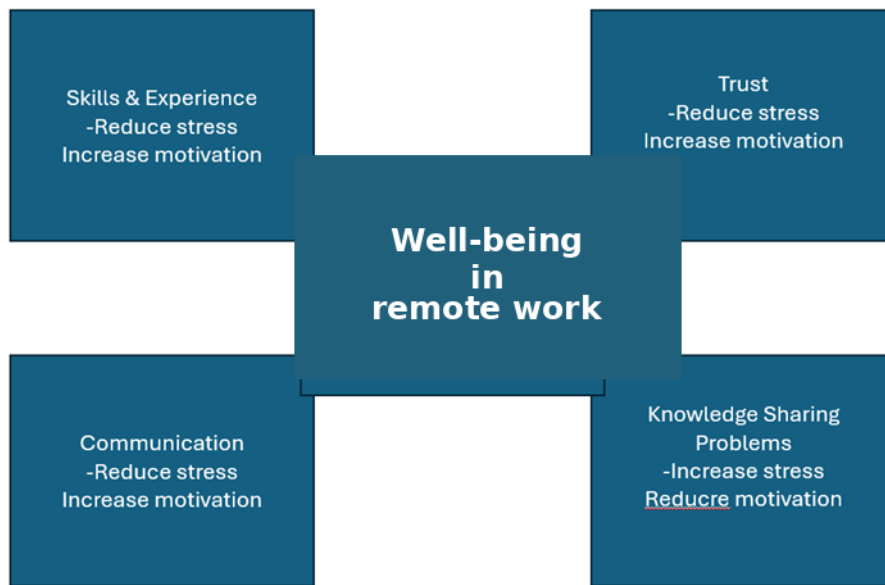


Figure 4. Well-being in remote work. Generated with the assistance of ChatGPT (OpenAI GPT-4) on 14.1.2026.

Also, according to Allen et al. (2024), adaptability to change is highlighted as a necessary ability to thrive in the context of remote work.

2.5 Superior-subordinate relationship (LMX-theory)

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) is a leadership theory that conceptualizes leadership as a set of dyadic relationships between a leader and each individual subordinate. In contrast to traditional leadership approaches that assume leaders apply a uniform leadership style to all followers, LMX theory posits that leaders develop relationships of varying quality with different subordinates (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

The origins of LMX theory can be traced to the Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL) approach developed in the 1970s, which highlighted systematic differences in leader-subordinate relationships within the same work group (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Over time, this

perspective evolved into LMX theory, shifting the focus from merely identifying differentiated relationships to examining the quality, development, and outcomes of these relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

A substantial body of empirical research has examined the antecedents and consequences of LMX. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that high-quality LMX is positively associated with a range of important work-related outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, individual performance, and reduced turnover intentions (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Dulebohn et al., 2012). Research has also identified several antecedents of LMX quality, such as leader behaviors, subordinate characteristics, and contextual factors that influence the development and maintenance of leader–member relationships (Dulebohn et al., 2012)

In recent years the studies about LMX have expanded in the context of remote work. Hill et al. (2009) highlight that electronic communication has crucial role through digital channels in shaping how tasks are coordinated and collaborative relationships developed. Since face-to-face communication is diminishing nowadays, the importance of electronic communication tools is becoming indispensable. These tools help the team achieve their goals both as individuals and as a unit. Also, the psychological empowerment side is specified. As the use of electronic communication tools increases, the stronger the LMX-relationship grows. Jansson & Kangas (2023) note that in remote work, managers are often perceived as more accessible than in on-site settings, but this constant availability increases their cognitive and emotional workload.

Relationships between supervisors and employees can also increase satisfaction with remote work arrangements when they help reconcile work and family responsibilities. Toscano, Zappalà, and Galanti (2022) examined the role of leader-member exchange (LMX) and found that a positive relationship with supervisors may reduce family-work conflict and enhance satisfaction with remote work. Moreover, employees' coping abilities strengthened this effect: those who managed daily work challenges more

effectively benefited more from supervisor support. The study highlights that high-quality leader-member relationships combined with employees' adaptability foster both satisfaction and work-life balance in remote work

2.6 LMX remote work on context of consulting

In recent years, Leader–Member Exchange theory has increasingly been applied to the study of remote, virtual, and hybrid work arrangements. This growing body of research suggests that although the fundamental mechanisms of LMX, such as social exchange, trust, and reciprocity, remain relevant, the context of remote work alters the conditions under which leader–member relationships develop and are maintained. Reduced face-to-face interaction and a greater reliance on digitally mediated communication shape how relationship quality is established, often increasing the importance of deliberate and structured interaction between leaders and subordinates.

One recurring finding in the literature is that the extent of remote or virtual work influences the strength of the relationship between LMX and key work-related outcomes. Empirical evidence indicates that the quality of the leader–member relationship becomes particularly significant when employees work extensively at a distance. In highly virtual work settings, high-quality LMX has been shown to be more strongly associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance than in more traditional, co-located environments. Conversely, low-quality leader–member relationships appear to have more negative consequences when opportunities for informal interaction and spontaneous support are limited (Golden & Veiga, 2008).

Research focusing on digitally mediated and distributed work further highlights the role of communication practices in shaping LMX relationships. When work coordination relies heavily on electronic communication, the frequency, responsiveness, and clarity of interactions between leaders and employees become even more important. In such environments, leadership behaviors that promote accessibility, timely feedback, and

clear expectations can help compensate for the absence of physical proximity. These findings suggest that while technology enables interaction, the relational quality of leader–member exchange depends largely on how communication is enacted rather than on the tools themselves.

LMX has also been examined in relation to employee well-being in remote work contexts. Studies adopting resource-based perspectives indicate that high-quality leader–member relationships are associated with lower levels of emotional exhaustion and higher work engagement among remote employees. In these studies, LMX is often conceptualized as a social resource that can buffer the demands of remote work, such as social isolation, role ambiguity, and blurred boundaries between work and private life. Where leader–member relationships are weaker, these challenges may become more pronounced, particularly in work settings where alternative sources of support are limited (Sardeshmukh et al., 2012).

Although research explicitly focusing on consulting firms remains relatively limited, several studies conducted in project-based and knowledge-intensive work environments provide insights that are directly applicable to consulting contexts. Such environments are typically characterized by temporary project assignments, high levels of task interdependence, and close collaboration with external stakeholders or client organizations. In these settings, employees may experience divided identification between their employing organization and the client organization. Existing research suggests that a high-quality relationship with one’s formal supervisor can play an important role in sustaining organizational attachment under these conditions, even when daily work takes place outside the employer’s physical and social environment.

Recent studies have also explored the role of LMX in supporting employees’ adjustment to remote and hybrid work arrangements. Findings indicate that stronger leader–member relationships are associated with better adaptation to changing work modes, lower levels of burnout, and reduced turnover intentions. These relationships appear to

help employees manage uncertainty and shifting expectations, which are common features of remote and client-oriented work settings (Toscano et al., 2022).

Taken together, the existing literature suggests that LMX theory offers a useful framework for understanding leadership dynamics in remote and consulting-oriented work contexts. While the core principles of LMX remain stable across settings, empirical research indicates that the quality of leader–member relationships becomes particularly salient in environments marked by physical distance, project-based work, and organizational fragmentation. As such, LMX provides a theoretically grounded lens for examining how leadership relationships support communication, cohesion, and organizational attachment in contemporary consulting organizations.

2.7 Remote work and its benefits in technical design service firms

Remote and hybrid work arrangements have become a permanent feature of many knowledge-intensive organizations, including technical design service firms such as engineering consultancies, architectural practices, and multidisciplinary design offices (Barrero et al., 2021). These organizations are typically characterized by project-based work, high levels of specialization, intensive collaboration, and a strong reliance on both formal and tacit knowledge (Alvesson, 2004; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). As a result, the effects of remote work extend beyond individual task performance and influence coordination, learning, and organizational functioning more broadly (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Yang et al., 2022).

A substantial body of research suggests that remote and hybrid work arrangements do not inherently reduce individual productivity in knowledge-based roles. Meta-analytical evidence indicates that telework is generally associated with equal or slightly higher job performance compared to traditional office-based work, particularly when employees have autonomy over their work and when tasks are cognitively demanding rather than routine (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). This is especially relevant for technical design

service firms, where work commonly involves complex problem-solving modelling, calculations, and documentation that benefit from sustained concentration. Survey-based studies among professional engineers support this conclusion, showing that most employees report stable or improved productivity during remote work periods, often attributing these outcomes to reduced interruptions and increased flexibility in managing working time (Ontario Society of Professional Engineers [OSPE], 2021). Similar findings have been reported in industry-focused studies within the architecture, engineering, and construction sector, where productivity levels largely remained unchanged following the transition to remote work (Cameron MacAllister Group, 2020).

Experimental research further strengthens this evidence base. A large-scale randomized controlled trial conducted by Bloom et al. (2022) found that hybrid work arrangements had no statistically significant negative effect on employee performance while simultaneously increasing job satisfaction and reducing voluntary turnover. Although the study was not limited to technical design service firms, its findings are highly applicable to expertise-driven organizations in which performance depends on the sustained contribution of highly skilled professionals. In such contexts, maintaining productivity while improving employee retention can have positive implications for organizational continuity and project delivery.

Remote work also alters patterns of working time allocation. Empirical research drawing on large international datasets indicates that employees save substantial time by eliminating commuting, and that approximately one-third to two-fifths of this saved time is reallocated to paid work activities (Barrero et al., 2021). This partial reallocation of time may help explain why individual productivity often remains stable or improves under remote work arrangements. At the same time, research has identified potential increases in work intensity associated with remote work. Teleworkers, particularly in professional and managerial roles, may experience longer working hours and greater self-imposed pressure to remain available, which can affect well-being even when output levels are maintained (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). In technical design service

firms, where deadlines and billable hours are commonly used performance indicators, these dynamics may shape work practices and employee experiences in important ways.

While individual productivity outcomes are generally neutral or positive, research consistently highlights challenges related to collaboration and coordination at the team and organizational levels. Large-scale analyses of communication and collaboration data show that remote work can lead to more siloed interaction networks, characterized by reduced cross-team communication and fewer informal exchanges (Yang et al., 2022). These structural changes may limit spontaneous problem-solving and interdisciplinary knowledge sharing, both of which are critical in technical design service firms that rely on close coordination between multiple specialized disciplines. Earlier organizational research has similarly emphasized the importance of physical proximity for effective coordination and knowledge exchange, particularly when tasks are complex and ambiguous (Bailey & Kurland, 2002).

Learning, onboarding, and the transfer of tacit knowledge represent additional challenges in remote and hybrid work contexts. Technical design service firms depend heavily on experiential knowledge, informal design heuristics, and firm-specific practices that are not always fully documented. Research suggests that remote work can hinder the transfer of such tacit knowledge, especially for early-career professionals and newly hired employees, who benefit from informal observation, spontaneous mentoring, and frequent interaction with more experienced colleagues (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; OSPE, 2021). Reduced exposure to diverse expertise and fewer opportunities for informal feedback may slow learning processes and affect long-term skill development, even if short-term productivity remains unaffected (Yang et al., 2022).

Beyond productivity and learning outcomes, remote and hybrid work arrangements also influence broader organizational dynamics. One of the most consistently reported effects is reduced employee turnover. Bloom et al. (2022) found that hybrid work significantly lowered quit rates without negatively affecting performance, suggesting

that flexible work arrangements can enhance employee retention. For technical design service firms, where recruiting and onboarding skilled professionals involves substantial time and cost, improved retention can strengthen organizational stability and help preserve institutional knowledge. However, research also indicates that perceptions of productivity may differ between employees and managers, with managers often expressing more conservative assessments of productivity under remote work arrangements (OSPE, 2021). This divergence highlights the challenges of measuring performance in project-based, collaborative environments where outputs are collective and not easily attributable to individual effort.

Overall, the literature suggests that remote and hybrid work arrangements in technical design service firms are generally associated with stable or improved individual productivity and positive retention outcomes, while simultaneously introducing risks related to collaboration, coordination, and knowledge transfer. The extent to which these arrangements support or hinder organizational effectiveness depends largely on how well firms adapt their management practices, communication structures, and learning processes to distributed work environments.

3 Methodology

This thesis is a case study that is performed with a methodological approach of mixed methods.

3.1 Case

The consulting company felt that the gap between managers and consultants was too vast. The goal they wanted to achieve was to see if there was anything to be done to bring the whole unit closer-knit. The name of the organization has been anonymized in this thesis at the request of the consulting company (hereafter referred to as Company X).

Company X is a multinational matrix organization in which operations are structured around both industry sectors and technical competencies. The company provides clients with skilled professionals and project solutions across numerous sectors. Approximately 70% of its overall business is centered specifically on engineering consulting. The role of managers is to acquire clients, identify and meet their needs, recruit the necessary specialists, and subsequently act as their supervisors and primary points of responsibility.

Company X's operations in Finland are based on two main business models. Approximately half of its activities consist of placing experts in client organizations, while the other half involves project deliveries in which Company X assumes overall responsibility for project implementation. The company's clients primarily operate in manufacturing and other technology-intensive industries, but assignments cover a wide range of expertise areas and engineering- and specialist-related tasks. Work is typically carried out based on client needs, either on the client's premises, remotely, or at Company X's own facilities.

Employment relationships at Company X are mainly permanent, meaning that individual client projects do not determine the employees' contracts with the company. Instead, contracts between Company X and its clients are typically fixed-term, usually ranging

from three to twelve months, while consultants' assignments with a client generally last about three to six months at a time. These contracts are renewed if the client's need continues, whereas directly agreeing on longer multi-year assignments is less common. The nature of projects varies considerably by client and industry. In some client organizations, a Company X consultant may work independently within a specific department, while in other projects several Company X employees may work together in the same team, sometimes even up to ten people. Thus, work can be both individual- and team-based, depending on the size of the project, the client's organizational structure, and the nature of the assignment.

There are multiple possible career paths within Company X, and progression is not tied to a single job title or technical role. Generally, employees may advance over time toward more demanding specialist positions, greater project responsibilities, or managerial roles such as team leader or line manager. Alternatively, some employees transition to so-called back-office functions, including sales, business development, or other support roles. An example mentioned in the background discussions of a transition toward a more sales-oriented position illustrates one possible career path, but does not represent the only or necessarily typical trajectory within the company.

Staff turnover is described as being at a typical level for the engineering sector and somewhat higher than in traditional product-based companies. The most common reasons for leaving are seeking new career challenges or better compensation. In some cases, clients also recruit Company X consultants directly into their own organizations when they wish to retain a high-performing employee.

When a project ends at a client organization, Company X generally seeks to place the consultant in a new assignment, either with the same client or another one. Therefore, the end of a single project does not usually mean the termination of employment but rather forms part of a longer-term employment relationship within the company.

3.2 Data Collection and analysis

The data for the thesis was collected via semi-structured interviews where managers were interviewed. The purpose of the managers' interviews was to gain an explicit view of the current situation from the leaders' perspective. Interviews were conducted as one-on-one sessions in Teams to ensure the most reliable and comprehensive answers. The interviewees were informed about the entire process, including the research questions, the purpose of the study, and the reasoning behind their selection, as understanding the full context was expected to enhance the quality of their answers.

In addition to the interviews, the thesis also draws on the employee satisfaction survey conducted in February 2025, which is part of a biannual company-wide survey process and serves as an additional source of insight. The survey is anonymous and based on a structured questionnaire administered to all employees. It evaluates organisational climate through multiple thematic categories and provides both numerical scores and qualitative insights generated from aggregated responses.

The survey measures several core dimensions, including engagement, energy and motivation, clarity of goals and expectations, team cooperation, managerial support, and leadership practices. Each theme consists of multiple statements to which employees respond using a Likert scale. The results are presented both as average scores and distribution percentages, making it possible to identify areas of strength and areas requiring development. For example, the survey reports clarity of goals, workload management, support during high-demand periods, levels of enjoyment and motivation, and perceptions of managerial behaviour, such as feedback frequency and involvement in team decisions.

In this thesis, the survey functions as a complementary data source that supports and contextualises the interview findings by offering a broader view of employees'

experiences related to workload, communication, leadership, and overall organisational engagement.

Table 1. Interviewed managers and their backgrounds

Manager	Position	Team Size	Years in Company	Years as Manager
Manager 1	Business Manager	10	2 years	1 year
Manager 2	Experienced Business Manager	25	2.5 years	2.5 years
Manager 3	Business Manager	40	5 years	5 years
Manager 4	Experienced Business Manager	50	1 year	1 year
Manager 4	Experienced Business Manager	50	1 year	1 year
Manager 5	Business Manager	No direct subordinates	2.5 years	New in role

The participants selected for this study represent a typical cross-section of managerial roles within the case organisation. The interviewed managers operate in core business functions of the consulting firm and are responsible for consultant teams working predominantly in remote and client-based settings, which reflects the organisation's prevailing mode of operation. Their responsibilities include client interaction, consultant supervision, and performance management, making them well positioned to provide insight into everyday leadership and communication practices. Although the sample size is limited, the managers oversee teams of varying sizes and operate across different projects and client contexts, enhancing the breadth of perspectives captured. As such, the sample can be considered sufficiently representative of the organisation's

managerial reality, even though the findings are not intended to be statistically generalisable beyond the case context.

3.3 Reliability and validity

3.3.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of research procedures and findings (Saunders et al., 2019). In this study, reliability was supported by using systematic and uniform data collection and analysis methods for both qualitative and quantitative components. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using the same interview guide for all participants to ensure that comparable themes were explored across cases. Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams with prior informed consent, recorded, and transcribed in full to support consistent treatment of data. Analytical procedures were documented and applied systematically, which enhances transparency and reduces the risk of researcher bias affecting the outcomes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The employee survey used in this study was administered uniformly to all respondents in February 2025 with a structured questionnaire that included multiple statements per construct of interest. The use of identical response scales and item formulations for all participants contributes to measurement consistency. Moreover, the survey's large respondent base and adequate response rate improve the stability of findings and reduce the likelihood that results are influenced by random variation. Combined, these procedures support the reliability of both interview and survey data.

3.3.2 Validity

Validity concerns whether the study accurately captures and measures the phenomena it intends to investigate (Yin, 2018). Construct validity was supported in this research by grounding data collection instruments in established theoretical frameworks related to leader–member exchange, remote leadership, and social cohesion. Interview questions were derived from these frameworks, ensuring consistency between the study's

theoretical basis and empirical inquiry. The combination of semi-structured interview data and employee survey data served as methodological triangulation, allowing insights from different data sources to corroborate one another (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Internal validity was addressed through careful alignment between empirical observations and theoretical constructs. Findings were interpreted in the light of theoretical expectations rather than assumed causal relationships, as the cross-sectional nature of the survey and the interpretive analysis of interviews do not allow for causal inference. Regarding external validity, the single-case setting limits statistical generalization beyond the studied organization. However, analytical generalizability is supported to the extent that results align with broader research on remote leadership and leader–member exchange contexts.

4 Results

All interviewed managers reported maintaining regular contact with their subordinates primarily through Teams meetings, phone calls, and chat messages. The frequency of communication varied significantly depending on the team size, individual preferences, and the manager's workload. One manager described having "one-to-one meetings every six weeks" lasting 15–30 minutes, while another mentioned that with a larger team of 40–50 subordinates, it was "impossible to stay in touch with everyone regularly."

Despite these challenges, most managers considered the current level of communication sufficient under existing constraints, though several expressed a wish for more frequent personal interactions. Some managers emphasized the importance of video presence, though it was noted that not all employees were comfortable with using cameras.

The managers consistently mentioned that remote work has complicated communication, particularly when team members are located across multiple countries or client sites. Several noted that the lack of spontaneous office encounters has reduced the sense of immediacy and "live connection." One manager summarized:

"Communication works, but there's always something missing when you never meet face to face."

To compensate for the reduced informal contact, managers rely on scheduled check-ins and digital monitoring tools to track performance and well-being. Yet, time and billing constraints often limit opportunities for longer discussions. As one interviewee noted, *"if a call lasts more than half an hour, the utilization rate drops — and someone will start asking questions."*

Overall satisfaction with current communication practices was moderate: managers saw them as functional but not ideal. Smaller teams were better able to maintain personal communication, while larger ones struggled with the volume of contacts.

4.1 Interview results

The interview findings reveal that communication between managers and consultants in a remote and client-based work environment is largely organized through digital channels, particularly Microsoft Teams meetings, phone calls, and instant messaging. These tools are used daily to coordinate work, address practical issues, and maintain contact between managers and their subordinates. From the managers' perspective, these communication practices were generally seen as functional and sufficient for handling operational matters, yet they were not considered ideal for fostering deeper relationships or a strong sense of belonging within the organization. The frequency and quality of communication varied significantly depending on team size, individual preferences, and managerial workload.

Managers responsible for smaller teams described being able to maintain relatively regular personal contact through structured one-to-one meetings, often held approximately every six weeks and lasting between 15 and 30 minutes. These meetings were typically supplemented by occasional face-to-face encounters such as informal lunches or ad hoc discussions when possible. In contrast, managers overseeing larger teams (40-50 people) reported substantial difficulties in maintaining close relationships with all subordinates. They emphasized that time constraints and performance-related pressures made it practically impossible to engage in frequent personal conversations with every team member.

Despite these challenges, most managers considered the current level of communication adequate under existing constraints, though several expressed a clear wish for more frequent personal interaction. Some managers highlighted the importance of video

presence in virtual meetings, believing that seeing colleagues on camera enhanced mutual understanding and engagement. However, they also acknowledged that not all employees felt comfortable using cameras, which sometimes limited the effectiveness of digital interaction.

Remote work was consistently described as a factor that had complicated communication and altered the nature of leader–subordinate relationships. Managers pointed out that when consultants are permanently placed at client sites or dispersed across different regions or countries, opportunities for spontaneous, informal interaction are greatly reduced. The absence of unplanned office encounters weakened the sense of immediacy and “live connection” that naturally emerges in shared physical spaces. As one manager summarized:

“Communication works, but there’s always something missing when you never meet face to face.”

To compensate for this loss of informal contact, managers relied more heavily on scheduled check-ins, structured meetings, and digital coordination tools to stay informed about employees’ performance, workload, and well-being. However, these formalized communication practices could not fully replace the relational richness of face-to-face interaction.

Moreover, the consulting business model introduced additional constraints, particularly related to billing and utilization targets. Managers explained that extended conversations were difficult to justify, as they directly affected performance metrics. One interviewee noted:

“If a call lasts more than half an hour, the utilization rate drops, which can lead to feedback relating to reduced efficiency rates”

This illustrates a structural tension between commercial performance requirements and the relational aspects of leadership, where time spent on personal discussions may be perceived as economically inefficient despite its potential value for trust and cohesion.

Beyond communication practices, a central theme emerging from the interviews concerned social cohesion within a dispersed, client-oriented work model. Managers frequently described their teams as fragmented, emphasizing that consultants often worked in isolation at client premises rather than as part of a unified internal community. This physical separation reduced everyday contact among colleagues from Company X and weakened employees' attachment to their employer organization.

A particularly significant finding was that many consultants identified more strongly with their client organization than with Company X itself, especially in long-term assignments. Managers observed that when consultants spent several years embedded in client teams, they gradually began to perceive themselves primarily as members of the client organization rather than as employees of Company X. This often resulted in a sense of distance from internal company culture and activities. One manager explicitly highlighted this issue by stating:

"Many consultants feel they belong to the client company rather than to Company X. Some even feel like outsiders at our own events."

This quotation captures a core challenge of the consulting model: while employees may be highly engaged in their daily work, their sense of belonging to the employer organization can become weak. Managers interpreted this divided identification as a structural consequence of the business model rather than a reflection of individual attitudes. Long-term client placements, geographical dispersion, and limited internal interaction within Company X all contributed to a diluted organizational identity.

Managers described several initiatives aimed at strengthening internal cohesion and counteracting this fragmentation. These included informal team lunches, small

gatherings, and company-wide events such as summer parties and Christmas celebrations. While these events were generally viewed positively, managers agreed that they were insufficient for creating a sustained sense of community. Large annual events did not necessarily translate into everyday belonging, particularly for consultants who rarely interacted with colleagues outside their immediate project teams.

Several managers suggested that more frequent small-scale interactions would be more effective in fostering cohesion. Proposed ideas included cross-project workshops, casual coffee meetings with a light agenda, and occasional office days where consultants could reconnect with colleagues and experience the broader organizational environment. One manager emphasized the importance of visibility and physical presence by noting:

“It helps if people just come to the office sometimes and see other Company X employees.”

However, implementing such initiatives was often constrained by limited budgets, time pressures, and the dispersed nature of work. Many consultants also preferred remote work or found it more practical to remain at client sites, which further complicated efforts to increase internal interaction.

In terms of everyday leadership practices, managers primarily supported their subordinates through practical assistance rather than formal supervisory control. Their role often involved handling administrative matters, resolving technical or contractual issues, ensuring access to necessary tools and licenses, and assisting with workload or project-related challenges. Managers emphasized the importance of being accessible and responsive, particularly in situations involving high workload, client conflicts, or well-being concerns.

Emotional support and recognition were also viewed as essential components of leadership, though time limitations often made it difficult to provide consistent personal feedback. Several interviewees acknowledged that regular, structured feedback discussions were not always systematically implemented, even though both managers

and employees recognized their value. Instead, feedback tended to occur in an ad hoc manner, often driven by immediate operational needs rather than long-term developmental goals.

The interviews also highlighted differences in managerial capacity depending on team size. Managers with smaller teams felt better equipped to build trust, understand individual needs, and maintain close relationships. In contrast, those responsible for very large teams experienced constant time pressure and often had to prioritize urgent business matters over relational leadership. Some managers even questioned the feasibility of providing high-quality leadership under such conditions, suggesting that either smaller teams or additional managerial support would be necessary.

Overall, the interview findings indicate that while managers generally strive to maintain supportive and trust-based relationships with their subordinates, the structural conditions of remote and client-based consulting work pose persistent challenges to social cohesion. Communication was largely effective at a functional, task-oriented level, but less successful in fostering a shared organizational identity. Employees were often highly motivated and engaged in their immediate work but felt only loosely connected to Company X as a collective entity.

Consequently, sustaining social cohesion appears to require not only individual managerial effort but also broader organizational initiatives. These include creating more opportunities for interaction, increasing managerial and organizational visibility, and designing internal practices that bridge the physical and social distance between consultants and the company. Without such systemic measures, the risk remains that employees will continue to identify primarily with their client organizations rather than with Company X, potentially weakening long-term organizational commitment and internal community.

4.2 Survey results

To complement the interview data, quantitative insights were drawn from Company X Commitment Survey conducted in February 2025. The survey assessed employees' perceptions of their engagement, energy, clarity, and leadership across four teams included in this study. Although the data are not extensive enough for statistical generalisation, they offer a meaningful overview of employee experiences and provide a quantitative context for interpreting the qualitative themes.

The combined results reveal moderate to high engagement levels, with most respondents positioned between "Satisfied" and "Fully engaged." Average engagement scores around 66–70 out of 100 indicate that employees generally experience their work as meaningful and energising, even in a dispersed and client-oriented setting. Motivation and job enjoyment were consistently strong, as most participants agreed that they enjoy their work and feel motivated to perform well. However, the sense of pride and organisational identification was notably weaker, suggesting that while employees are engaged in their immediate tasks, they feel somewhat detached from the company as a larger entity. This finding reflects a broader challenge typical of consulting and project-based organisations, where employees primarily work at client premises and may identify more strongly with the client than with their employer. The data therefore illustrate the tension between individual motivation and collective belonging, a theme that also emerged strongly in the interviews.

Clarity of goals and expectations appeared as a recurring theme. Employees generally reported that they understand what is expected from them in their daily work but were less certain about how their team contributes to the organisation's wider goals. This suggests that while task-level communication functions well, the strategic communication chain, linking individual performance to broader organisational objectives, is not always fully visible to employees. The findings align with the interview insights, where managers described how time constraints and the client-based model limit their ability to communicate long-term strategy or foster spontaneous discussions

about company direction. Communication was often described as operational and transactional, focusing on project outcomes and administrative needs rather than a shared vision or company culture. This imbalance may partially explain the moderate engagement scores: when employees lack clarity about the purpose and value of their work within the organisation, their motivation, though high, may not translate into sustained organisational commitment.

Leadership emerged as one of the strongest aspects across the dataset. The overall leadership index averaged around 72-75 points, placing it close to, or slightly above the organisational mean. Respondents expressed trust in their managers and appreciation for the support they receive, with the highest-scoring items related to receiving help from their manager and feeling appreciated. However, two areas were perceived as weaker: the frequency of feedback and the level of involvement in decision-making. These results suggest that although managers are seen as competent and supportive, communication practices could become more interactive and participatory. In the interviews, managers themselves acknowledged these gaps, noting that limited time, heavy workload, and utilisation pressures often reduce opportunities for regular feedback or informal check-ins.

The survey results thus confirm that while leadership relationships are fundamentally positive, systematic communication structures, such as recurring development discussions and open forums for reflection, remain underdeveloped.

Although the Commitment Survey did not directly measure social cohesion, several indicators provide insight into employees' sense of community and belonging. The combination of high motivation but moderate organisational pride implies that employees are engaged with their immediate work environment but experience weaker ties to the employer organisation. This pattern aligns with qualitative reflections, where managers noted that consultants working on client sites often identify more with the client teams than with Company X itself. The survey's energy and engagement results

mirror this pattern- people feel motivated by their projects yet somewhat peripheral to the company culture. This phenomenon highlights a structural challenge in remote and client-oriented contexts: physical and social distance from colleagues can dilute collective identity. Maintaining cohesion therefore requires deliberate communication efforts, such as team events, informal online gatherings, and regular cross-project interactions that reconnect employees to the organisation and to one another.

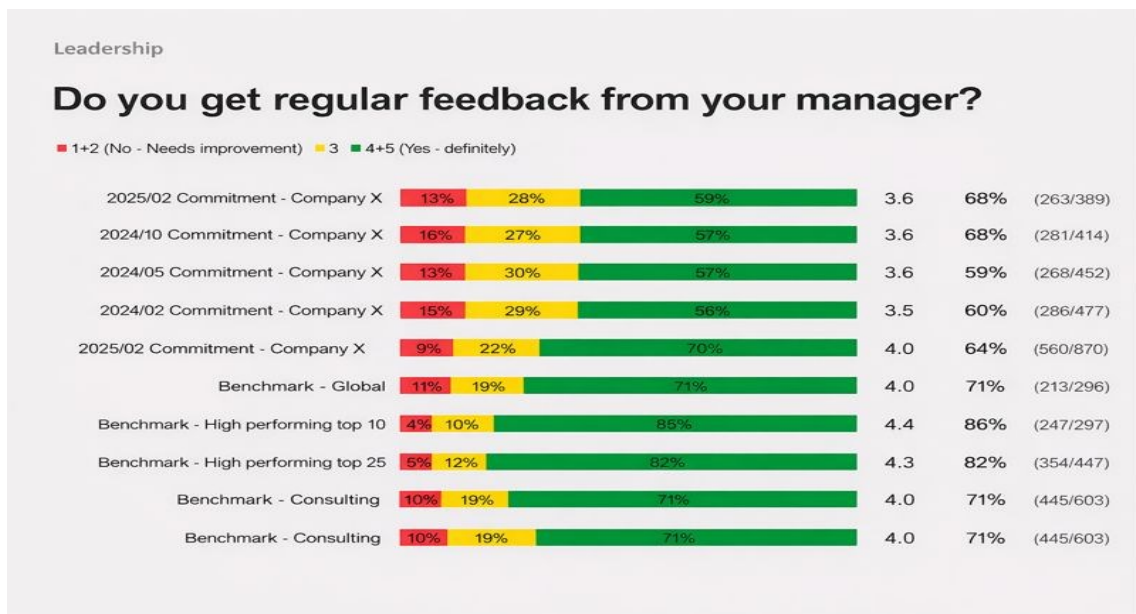


Figure 5. Feedback from managers.

The results for “Do you get regular feedback from your manager?” indicate that employees receive feedback only occasionally rather than consistently. With average scores between 3.1 and 3.5, the teams fall below both company-wide and high-performing benchmarks. This suggests that although managers are perceived as supportive, the regular cadence of feedback is lacking. The qualitative interviews reinforce this interpretation, as managers described limited time for one-to-one discussions due to operational pressures.

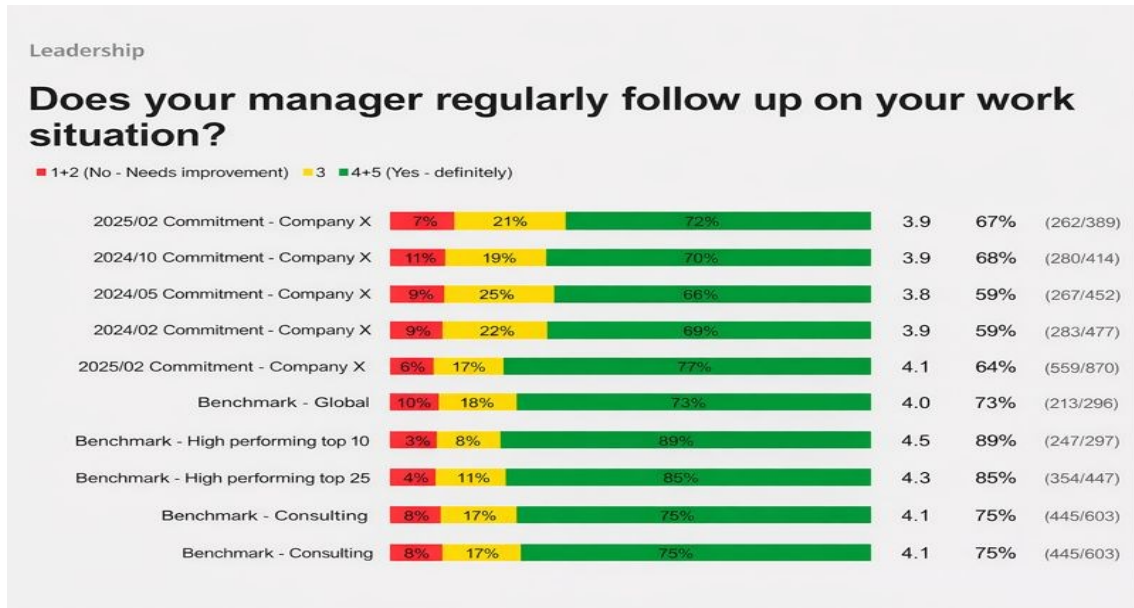


Figure 6. Managers follow up.

The survey item measuring whether managers regularly follow up on employees' work situations received an average score of approximately 3.9, indicating that employees generally perceive follow-up as occurring to a satisfactory degree. While this reflects a largely positive experience, the result sits slightly below the levels reported in high-performing benchmark groups, where follow-up is typically rated more consistently and at a higher frequency. This suggests that, although employees feel their managers are present and supportive when needed, the practice of checking in on work situations may not be fully systematic or equally established across teams. The interview data reinforce this interpretation, as managers noted that remote work arrangements and competing operational responsibilities often limit opportunities for routine follow-up conversations. Overall, the finding points to a reasonably healthy foundation but also highlights an opportunity to develop more structured and predictable practices for monitoring employee well-being and workload.

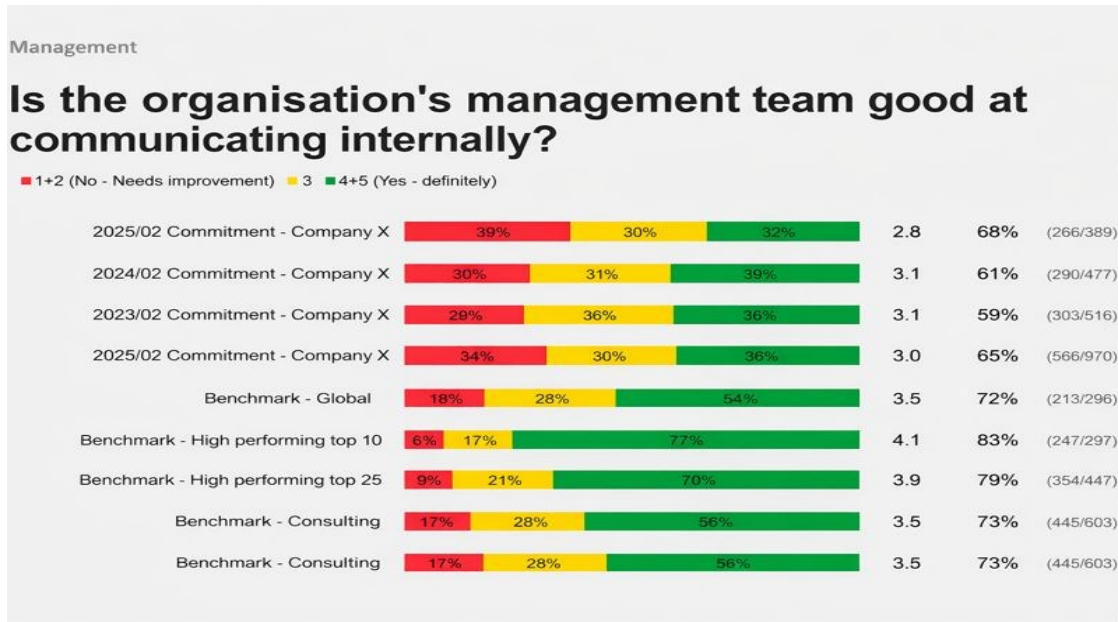


Figure 7. Internal communication.

Graph indicates that employees perceive internal communication from senior leadership as extremely weak. Compared with the more favourable evaluations of communication with immediate managers, this item received noticeably lower scores, suggesting that organisation-wide messages are not reaching employees as effectively as team-level communication. The result reflects a sense that top management is less visible and less consistent in sharing information that supports a unified understanding of organisational goals. This pattern is also consistent with the interview data, where managers noted that the dispersed, client-based work model makes it challenging for leadership communication to remain clear and accessible across the organisation.

When viewed as a whole, the survey portrays an organisation characterised by motivated and resilient employees, led by supportive managers, but constrained by communication gaps and structural fragmentation. The data reveal key strengths: high individual energy and motivation, trust in managers, and overall positive work experiences, but also several development areas, such as strategic clarity, organisational identification, feedback frequency, and social connection among employees. These findings support and expand the qualitative results: effective communication and

leadership are central to sustaining engagement and cohesion in a distributed workforce. Without clear goal alignment and consistent interpersonal communication, employees may remain productive yet disconnected from the organisation's collective mission.

4.3 Summary of Quantitative Insights

The aggregated survey findings emphasise three key implications for managerial communication and team cohesion. First, communication must bridge levels of meaning. From individual tasks to organisational purpose, to strengthen identification and motivation. Second, leadership effectiveness depends not only on support but also on dialogue: feedback, participation, and two-way communication enhance engagement. Third, social cohesion must be actively maintained in a remote and client-based model through deliberate interaction, transparency, and community-building practices.

In conclusion, the Commitment Survey results reinforce the argument that communication quality is a key determinant of both engagement and belonging. While employees exhibit high intrinsic motivation, their full potential for organisational commitment can only be realised through stronger clarity, relational communication, and sustained efforts to build a shared organisational identity across distances.

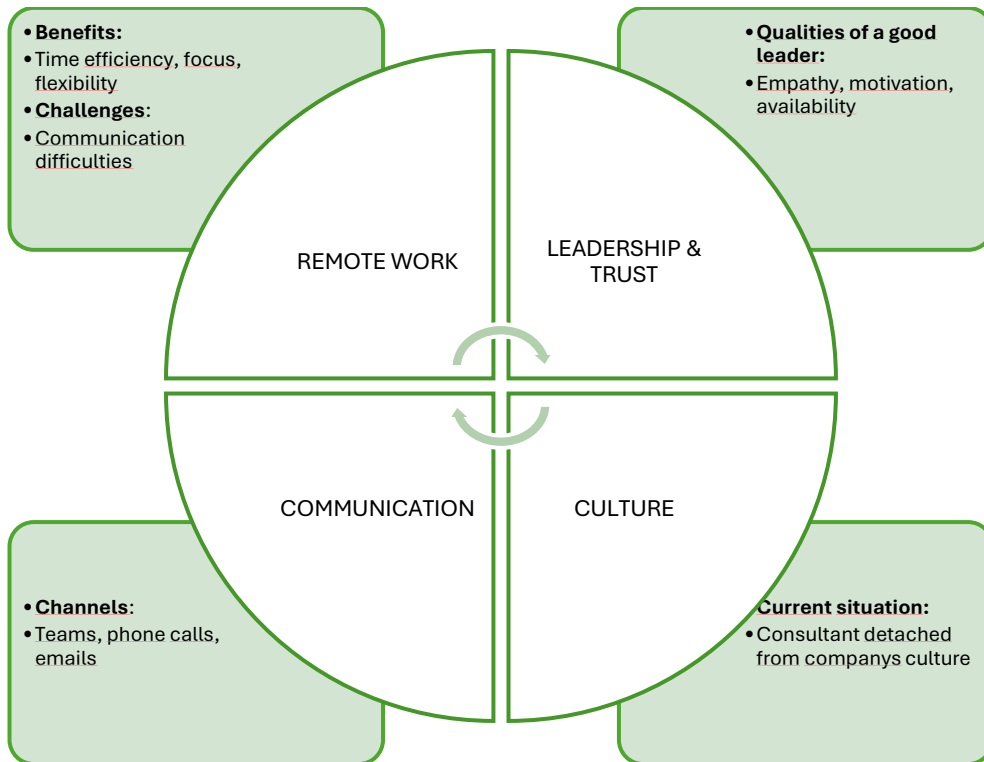


Figure 8. Summary of the current state in Company X.

Allen et al. (2024) highlights the decisive role organizational support and culture in determining whether working remotely is sustainable. Organizations that provide clear communication structures, shared norms for availability, and a culture that values both autonomy and connection create the most favorable conditions for employee success in remote work. Cultures grounded in trust, fairness, and openness help prevent isolation, reduce ambiguity, and support both performance and well-being over time. Therefore, working remotely requires not only individual skills but also organizational systems that strengthen stability and collaboration.

Allen et al. (2024) further found out self-reflection and emotional regulation to be essential for sustaining well-being in remote work context. Individuals who recognize their emotional responses, manage stress proactively, and maintain motivation despite reduced in-person contact are more resilient and less prone to burnout. The ability to reflect on personal work habits and adjust them to changing conditions supports

psychological recovery and enables employees to cope with the dynamic demands of remote work.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Key findings

The purpose of this study was to explore leadership and communication practices in a remote and client-oriented engineering consulting environment. The research focused on understanding how managers perceive their role in maintaining effective communication, supporting social cohesion, and sustaining organizational connection among consultants who primarily work remotely or at client sites. The study was conducted as a qualitative case study and aimed to provide an in-depth view of managerial experiences in a contemporary consulting context. The research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What communication tools and means are currently used by managers and subordinates in a remote and client-based work environment, and how are these practices perceived?
2. How can managers support and improve social cohesion among consultants working remotely or at client organizations?

By addressing these questions, the study sought to identify key challenges and enabling factors related to leadership in dispersed consulting teams. The empirical findings are based on semi-structured interviews with managers and provide insights into how leadership practices are currently implemented, as well as how they could be further developed to better support consultants in remote and client-oriented work settings.

This section summarizes the key findings of the study by bringing together the most central themes emerging from the empirical data. The findings are presented in relation to the research questions and highlight the role of communication, managerial presence, and intentional leadership practices in remote consulting work.

The results of this study show that communication between managers and consultants in a remote and client-based work environment is largely organized through digital

channels such as video meetings, instant messaging, and phone calls. These tools are used on a daily basis to coordinate work, address practical issues, and maintain contact between managers and their subordinates. From the managers' point of view, the existing communication practices were generally considered adequate for ensuring that work-related matters are handled efficiently. At the same time, both the interview material and the survey results point to differences in how communication is experienced, particularly in relation to the regularity of feedback, opportunities for discussion, and involvement in decision-making.

A clear distinction emerged between communication at the level of the immediate supervisor and communication originating from the wider organization. Interaction with direct managers was mostly described as accessible and supportive, whereas communication from higher organizational levels was perceived as less consistent and less visible. This suggests that while day-to-day managerial communication functions relatively well, broader organizational messages may not always reach employees in a way that strengthens their understanding of the organization as a whole.

In terms of social cohesion, the study highlights the importance of managers' everyday behavior in shaping consultants' experiences of belonging. Managers emphasized being available, responding promptly to questions, and showing interest in employees' work situations. These actions were also reflected in the survey results, which showed generally positive evaluations of leadership at the immediate managerial level. Such practices appear to contribute to a sense of trust and support, which is particularly important in situations where interaction is primarily mediated and face-to-face contact is limited.

At the same time, the results show the limits of individual managerial efforts in a remote and client-oriented work model. Consultants often spend long periods working at client sites, which reduces their contact with colleagues from their own organization and weakens their attachment to the employer organization. The absence of informal

encounters and spontaneous interaction further makes it more difficult to develop and maintain a shared sense of community. These structural conditions create challenges that cannot be fully addressed through interpersonal leadership alone.

Overall, the study suggests that supporting social cohesion in remote and client-based consulting work requires both consistent managerial practices and organizational-level initiatives. While managers play a key role in maintaining day-to-day relationships, longer-term cohesion appears to depend on how well the organization creates opportunities for interaction, visibility, and shared experiences across physical and organizational boundaries.

5.2 Practical implications

The findings of this study offer practical value for managers and consulting organizations more broadly, particularly those operating in remote and client-oriented work environments. As consulting work increasingly takes place outside the employer's physical premises, organizations face growing challenges related to communication, leadership visibility, and the maintenance of organizational cohesion. The results of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of how leadership practices can be adapted to address these challenges and support consultants working at a distance.

At a general level, the study highlights the importance of intentional leadership and structured communication in remote consulting contexts. Managers across consulting organizations can benefit from recognizing that effective leadership in such environments cannot rely on informal or spontaneous interaction alone. Instead, leadership requires deliberate efforts to maintain regular contact, ensure clarity of expectations, and foster trust and engagement through consistent communication practices. These findings are relevant to consulting firms seeking to sustain employee well-being, motivation, and long-term commitment in increasingly flexible work models.

In addition to its broader relevance, this study provides the case company with a concrete overview of its current leadership and communication practices from a managerial perspective. The findings provide a situational assessment of how communication is currently experienced and highlight where existing practices function well, and where further development is needed. In particular, the results point to opportunities to enhance the predictability, quality, and consistency of communication between managers and consultants working remotely or at client sites.

Based on the findings, the case company can identify specific development areas related to strengthening internal cohesion and organizational connection. These include reinforcing regular one-on-one communication, creating shared internal practices that support a sense of belonging, and ensuring that consultants remain visibly connected to the organization despite their physical distance. By addressing these areas, the company can improve both the effectiveness of managerial communication and consultants' experience of being supported by their employer organization.

In addition, the findings suggest that small-scale, structured team-level check-ins could support communication and cohesion, particularly in smaller consulting teams. One possible approach could be the introduction of brief, regular team synchronization meetings similar to daily stand-up or "daily scrum" practices used in agile project environments. Such meetings typically involve short updates on current work, priorities, and potential challenges, helping to maintain shared awareness and team connection in distributed settings. However, given the time constraints and large team sizes identified in this study, such practices would likely be most feasible in smaller teams or subgroups. In very large teams, daily synchronization meetings may become impractically long and counterproductive, exceeding the intended brief duration and adding to time pressure rather than reducing it. Therefore, any adoption of this type of practice should be carefully scaled and adapted to the team's size and workload conditions.

Overall, the findings of this study can serve as a practical foundation for the case company to develop further its leadership and communication practices in a targeted and evidence-based manner. By applying the insights presented in this thesis, the organization can enhance internal communication, support managerial work, and strengthen cohesion in its remote and client-based consulting operations.

5.3 Limitations of the study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research is based on a single case organization, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other industries or organizational contexts. Second, the empirical data reflect only the managerial perspective, and the absence of consultants' viewpoints may restrict the comprehensiveness of the conclusions. Third, the qualitative nature of the study and the limited number of interviews constrain the broadness of the findings, although they allow for in-depth exploration of managerial experiences.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

Future research could further examine remote work as a standardized and long-term form of work in the post-COVID-19 context. As remote and hybrid work arrangements have become an established part of organizational practices, there is a need to shift the focus from pandemic-related adjustments to the sustained development of remote work and leadership over time.

Also, future studies could explore how individuals gradually adapt to prolonged remote work. While earlier research has primarily addressed immediate challenges arising from the sudden transition to remote work, less attention has been paid to how employees' experiences, well-being, motivation, and work-related behaviours evolve as remote work becomes normalized. Longitudinal studies would be especially valuable in

capturing these changes and providing a deeper understanding of individual-level adaptation processes. This was also highlighted by managers, who underlined the divergences in subordinates' personal needs.

5.5 Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence has been partially utilized in the preparation of this thesis. The OpenAI ChatGPT 5 application was used in accordance with the university's guidelines on the responsible use of artificial intelligence. All content generated with the assistance of artificial intelligence has been treated critically, and its use has been carefully considered throughout the research process.

Although the final text of the thesis has been written by the author, artificial intelligence was used as a supportive tool, for example in improving the clarity and structure of the text. The author remains solely responsible for the accuracy, quality, and academic integrity of the thesis and its contents.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions for superiors

Background information

- Position and the team you lead?
- How long have you worked in your current position?
- How long have you worked as a manager?
- How many subordinates do you have?

Remote work

- How often do you work remotely?
- What do you consider the advantages of remote work?
- What do you consider the challenges of remote work?
- Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your remote work practices? If yes, how?
- Do you feel your relationship with your subordinates has changed after COVID-19?
- Are you ever physically present at the office at the same time as your subordinates?

Communication

- How often are you in contact with your subordinates and through which channels?
- Do you consider the current level of communication sufficient?
- Is communication similar with all subordinates, or are there differences?
- What challenges have you encountered in maintaining a close manager-subordinate relationship?
- How would you develop communication in your current subordinate relationships?

Remote leadership

- What qualities do you consider important for a good manager?
- How would you describe the level of trust between managers and subordinates in remote work?
- How do you practically support your subordinates in their daily work?

Other

- Do consultants interact with other colleagues from the consulting company?
- How is it currently ensured that consultants feel included in the company's culture and activities?
- How are consultants' work motivation and well-being supported from the consulting company's perspective?