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## **Adapting to the post-pandemic hybrid model**

Leadership in hybrid virtual environment

School of Management  
Strategic Business Development  
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**VAASAN YLIOPISTO****School of Management**

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**TIIVISTELMÄ:**

Tämä Pro Gradu -tutkielma tarkastelee hybridijohtamista ja tiimin suoriutumista uudessa pandemian jälkeisessä toimintaympäristössä. Vuonna 2020 Covid-19 pandemia levisi ympäri maailmaa ravisuttaen yhteiskuntaa. Yhteiskunnallisen tason lisäksi vaikutus yrityksiin oli suuri, sillä yritysten tuli nopeasti reagoida ennennäkemättömään tilanteeseen muuttamalla työskentelytapojaan ja -ympäristöään. Moni yritys siirtyikin nopeasti etätyömalliin välttääkseen viruksen leviämistä. Pandemian jälkeisistä kokonaisvaltaisista etätyösuosituksista on lähes kaikkialla luovuttu, mutta tämän tilalle on tullut uusi toimintatapa, hybridityö, joka yhdistää perinteisen läsnäoloa vaativan työn sekä etätyön. Hybridityön lisääntyessä johtajien on mietittävä sen järkevää organisoimista sekä laadukasta johtamista.

Tämän tutkielman tarkoitus on tutkia pandemian jälkeistä hybridijohtamista sekä sitä, miten hybridijohtajat voivat tehokkaasti johtaa hybriditiimejä. Tieteellinen kirjallisuus sekä pandemian vaikutuksista että virtuaalitiimeistä ja -työskentelystä on kasvanut valtavasti viimeisten muutaman vuoden aikana, mutta itse hybridijohtamista käytännössä ei vielä ole laajasti tutkittu. Tämä tutkielma tuo sekä uuden näkökulman aikaisempaan kirjallisuuteen että antaa yrityksille ja johtajille ohjeistusta siitä, mikä olisi hybridimallin optimaalinen toimintatapa ja miten työntekijöitä tulisi johtaa näissä olosuhteissa.

Tämä tutkielma on toteutettu laadullisin menetelmin käyttäen puolistrukturoituja teemahaastatteluja ja sitä varten on toteutettu 13 videohaastattelua. Haastateltavien joukko koostui kahdeksasta esihenkilöstä ja viidestä työntekijästä eri rooleista ja toimialoilta, jotta tutkimuksessa saataisiin laajemmin osapuolten syvälliset näkemykset odotuksista, haasteista ja onnistumisista otettua huomioon.

Tutkimuksen tuloksena syntyi dynaaminen hybridimalli, joka kokoaa yhteen hybridijohtamisen ja hybriditiimin toiminnan keskeiset kulmakivet. Hybridijohtajuus vaatii esihenkilöltä uuden oppimista ja mukautumista ja esihenkilön rooli hybridimallissa korostuu. Hybridijohtamisen keskiössä ovat luottamus, itsensä johtaminen ja kommunikaatio. Hybridijohtajuudessa tulee huomioida tiimin yksilölliset erot sekä jakaa vastuuta tiimin kesken. Lisäksi tulee kiinnittää huomiota myös yhteisöllisyyden sekä työhyvinvoinnin merkitykseen ja välttää yksilön syrjäytymisen mahdollisuutta. Hybriditiimin johtamistavoista korostuivat valmentava johtajuus, palvelujohtajuus sekä adaptiivinen johtajuus. Tuloksista ilmeni, että hybridijohtamisen peruspilarina on yhteinen kulttuuri sekä selkeästi määritetyt ja kommunikoidut tavoitteet. Hybridimalli tulee aina soveltaa kuhunkin tiimiin erikseen, tiimille sopivalla tavalla.

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**AVAINSANAT:** Hybrid leadership, Hybrid team, Virtual leadership, Team performance, COVID-19 pandemic

## **Table of contents**

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1	Motivation for the study	6
1.2	Research gap	7
1.3	Research objectives	8
1.4	Thesis structure	9
<b>2</b>	<b>Literature review</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1	Working environment	11
2.1.1	Virtual work	11
2.1.2	Hybrid work	13
2.1.3	Virtual teams	14
2.1.4	Virtual team's advantages and challenges	15
2.1.5	Virtual team's success factors	16
2.1.6	Hybrid teams	20
2.2	Leadership in virtual and hybrid context	21
2.2.1	Virtual leadership	21
2.2.2	Virtual leadership success factors	22
2.2.3	Hybrid leadership	24
2.2.4	Hybrid team leadership strategy	28
2.3	Theoretical framework: The hybrid model	34
<b>3</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>36</b>
3.1	Research strategy and method	36
3.2	Data collection	37
3.3	Data analysis	39
<b>4</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>41</b>
4.1	Team success factors	41
4.1.1	Communication	41
4.1.2	Trust	44
4.1.3	Team Cooperation	46

4.1.4	Reliability	49
4.1.5	Social Presence	49
4.1.6	Well-being	51
4.2	Hybrid leadership success factors	52
4.2.1	Trust	52
4.2.2	Environment	54
4.2.3	Communication	55
4.2.4	Social and cultural skills	59
4.2.5	Team cooperation	64
4.2.6	Social Pressure	66
4.2.7	Guidance	69
4.2.8	Planning and scheduling	72
4.3	Drivers between the team and leadership interaction	74
4.3.1	Motivation	74
4.3.2	Comfort	75
4.3.3	Innovation	76
4.3.4	Self-management	76
4.3.5	Strategy and vision	78
4.4	Key findings and extended model	78
5	Summary and discussion	84
5.1	Summary	84
5.2	Theoretical implications	86
5.3	Managerial implications	88
5.4	Limitations	88
5.5	Suggestions for future research	89
	References	90
	Appendix 1. Semi-structured interview	98

## List of Figures

Figure 1. The structure of the thesis.	10
Figure 2. A conceptual model for improving performance in virtual project teams.	17
Figure 3. Hybrid model - Place & Time.	26
Figure 4. How to do hybrid right.	28
Figure 5. Hybrid Team Task Location Options.	32
Figure 6. Theoretical framework.	35
Figure 7. Research onion.	36
Figure 8. Analytical coding process using Gioia Methodology.	40
Figure 9. Extended model - the synthesis of theory and empirical findings.	82

## List of Tables

Table 1. Positive and negative factors of virtual team's success.	16
Table 2. Critical questions to guide the leadership of hybrid teams.	30
Table 3. Interview information	38
Table 5. Summary of leading in hybrid virtual environment.	79

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Motivation for the study

The Covid-19 pandemic has enormously impacted society and has also disrupted the working environment and current working habits. Companies have needed to make rapid changes in the way of work because of the pandemic. During the pandemic years, working methods have been mostly virtual in most companies, if it has been possible to operate remotely. During the pandemic, there has been remote work recommendation in Finland, however, now it has been removed. Therefore, companies have moved towards the “new normal”. Many companies are now combining onsite and offsite work as a new hybrid working environment (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022). Consequently, at the moment, leadership also needs a new review that how it works in a hybrid working environment where onsite and offsite working is combined. Hence, hybrid teams have become more common in companies, so leadership should also be viewed from this perspective.

The pandemic raised this virtual work to the attention of many companies as they quickly switched to virtual working environments to avoid the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Although many companies switched to virtual working due to the pandemic, some companies also continued the so-called traditional model of face-to-face work if the company’s operations did not allow for virtual working. However, also many traditional teams utilize the technology used by virtual teams (Arnison & Miller, 2002).

As the pandemic had an enormous impact on doing business and the working environment, it also caused leaders to get used to the new working methods. Hence, the pandemic forced employers and employees to find and adopt a new way of working in a new normal post-pandemic working environment where the pre-pandemic is no return. (Kane et al., 2021) Currently, companies have settled back on offices after two years of full virtual working. However, working in an office is no longer mandatory in companies, but it is more like an opportunity. The hybrid model offers companies opportunities but

also challenges. Hence, to avoid common mistakes in leadership and overcome the challenges, it is reasonable to study the subject more closely.

## 1.2 Research gap

Leadership has many definitions in the literature, but Contreras et al. (2020) note that it can commonly be described as *“an influence process to achieve organizational goals”*. In the on-site work environment that influence is practiced by both, leaders and employees. However, in the virtual work environment, the influence of leaders is more recognizable as they are the ones needing to create an efficient and well-operating virtual team to achieve organizational goals.

Various researchers have studied the operation of virtual teams. A lot of research has been made on how virtual teams differ from face-to-face coordination, communication, and collaboration. (Gibson & Cohen, 2003; Majchrzak et al., 2004; Järvenpää et al., 2004.) The communication of virtual teams has also played a significant role in research. For example, what communication techniques are needed to enable the work of virtual teams and to share information (Cascio, 2000 and Ziguers, 2003). Additionally, Van Wart et al. (2019) define virtual leadership to involve both, combining traditional communication methods with technology as well as fully utilizing the ICT-facilitated communication. They also remind that virtual leadership has become a critical skill for leaders at every level. On the other hand, Malhotra et al. (2007) focus on their study on how leaders manage challenges in virtual management. Besides, Ziek and Smulowitz (2014) study how leadership impacts team effectiveness. Lie et al. (2020) argue that virtual leadership is an essential phenomenon for companies as it forces companies to adopt the newest technology so that virtual leadership can be as efficient as possible. However, Van Wart et al. (2019) point out that there have not been many studies of the digital revolution's impact on leadership, mainly due to difficulties in defining virtual leadership that covers virtual work, team, and enterprise environments. Contreras et al. (2020) remind of the importance of examining virtual leadership as, due to the pandemic,

it is more needed than on-site leadership. Organizations have settled for hybrid work, a mix of colocated and virtual work environments. The new work environment is constantly learning the new way of the work and what opportunities and challenges the hybrid emerges. Leadership development can be brought up as one concern of the hybrid. Hence, this arises the possibility for leaders to learn and grow. (Birkinshaw et al., 2022.)

Ultimately, research has not focused that much on leadership in a hybrid working environment, due to its novelty. In particular, topics of what skills are needed and how it differs from pre-pandemic situation have not received great academic attention yet. There is a lack of theoretical perspective that considers hybrid leadership success in the hybrid working environment. As hybrid teams and hybrid leading is generally a new topic for companies due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is essential to research the topic more specifically.

Thereby, this thesis explores the matter more through practice, to present how to lead in hybrid virtual environment. The study also considers how the rapid change from on-site work to virtual and hybrid work has affected leadership, for example, because of Covid-19. Hence, this study examines hybrid leadership and team performance in the new post-pandemic hybrid working environments with a focus on virtual leadership rather than colocated leadership.

### **1.3 Research objectives**

The research objective is to study how leaders can effectively lead hybrid teams and, further, to understand the hybrid working environment to ensure hybrid teams' successful performance. To answer the research gap presented above, this study examines the matter by answering the research question:

*How to lead and perform in a hybrid work environment?*

To interpret the main research question, the study opens it with two sub-questions:

*What are the success factors for the hybrid model?*

*How to facilitate the hybrid team?*

The aim is to study leadership in hybrid teams, and the goal of this study is to understand how to effectively lead a team in a hybrid working environment. Additionally, the purpose is to emphasize leadership importance and construct guidelines for hybrid leaders on how to lead hybrid teams. By answering the research question and two sub-questions, the study aims to provide guidelines for leaders on how to facilitate hybrid work arrangements in an equitable and efficient manner that ensures long-term advantages for both individuals and the organization. Hence, the study aims to accomplish the above mentioned by creating a theoretical framework that is reviewed from the existing literature. This framework is the basis for a qualitative study, which will be conducted using semi-structured interviews. Through using a qualitative research method, the study can delve into the lived experiences of leaders and employees in a hybrid work environment and gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions, challenges, and successes. By following this road, the study will contribute to the existing research of hybrid models in a practical post-pandemic context.

#### **1.4 Thesis structure**

The thesis is divided into five main chapters. Thus, Figure 1 demonstrates the structure of the thesis. The first chapter concentrates on the introduction and research background to discuss the studied issues. In addition, the first chapter presents the purpose of the study and the research question including its two sub-questions. The second chapter processes literature on the working environment. The chapter deepens the knowledge of virtual and hybrid working through different authors' perspectives. This chapter also focuses on the teams and defines virtual teams' advantages, challenges,

and success factors. The third chapter introduces the research methodology. This chapter additionally explains the data collection and data analysis methods. Hereafter, the fourth chapter presents the findings obtained through the empirical research conducted and provides an analysis of the gathered data. Overall, the fifth chapter, the last part of the thesis, summarizes the key findings and provides an answer to the research question and sub-questions. Moreover, the chapter outlines the theoretical and managerial implications of the research. It also discusses the limitations of the study and recommends areas for further research.



**Figure 1.** The structure of the thesis.

## **2 Literature review**

### **2.1 Working environment**

The change in the nature of work has already occurred years before the Covid-19 pandemic. Business operations globalization as well as domestic and foreign competitive environment have accelerated companies' activity (Townsend et al., 1998). Additionally, the technological revolution brought by advances in information and communication has already accelerated the change and transformed companies' operations into more dynamic virtual working environments (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Thus, over the years, technological change has pushed companies to become more dynamic and to integrate into new innovative opportunities to survive and be competitive in the marketplace (Arnison & Miller, 2002). Technological change has enabled rapid change and created more diverse and complex jobs. With technology, companies are placing more emphasis on virtual teams and a virtual way of work (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Companies are capable to act quickly and shape complex teams and attract talents to meet demand and the global marketplace competition (Kankanhalli et al., 2007).

#### **2.1.1 Virtual work**

In virtual work, employees are in close cooperation with familiar colleagues, but casual contacts may be missed (Kane et al., 2021). The pandemic forced companies globally to operate virtually and proved what academic researchers and technology visionaries have already presented since the 1980s; virtual work creates opportunities. During the pandemic, employers have learned that most work tasks and meetings can be carried out efficiently virtually as they were previously done in the office. (Fayard et al., 2021.)

The pandemic has taught that employees can be effective virtually and can easier concentrate the time to work. However, virtual work does not only bring benefits, but it can also have a negative impact on various things in the work community. For example,

a lack of casual contacts can negatively affect innovation, as these casual connections are critical for innovation and information and knowledge sharing. Virtual working has also been seen to have a negative effect on maintaining organizational culture. It has been seen that maintaining culture requires physical encounters in the workplace. For example, organizational culture being visible in how it used to be dressed is not visible in the virtual work. The lack of strong culture may also be seen as a difficulty in the onboarding process of a new employee. (Kane et al., 2021.) Additionally, Fayard et al. (2021) note that, in virtual work, non-verbal signals are more difficult to detect, even though a video connection. On the other hand, Kane et al. (2021) point out the possibility of virtual working having a negative effect on the employees' career development if attention is not being paid to feedback and development possibilities in the work environment. As during the pandemic in the companies, less time was spent on mentoring and coaching younger employees in virtual work than before the pandemic. (Kane et al., 2021.)

Although companies have been familiar with virtual working even before the pandemic, some companies have just gotten used to it after the pandemic started. Thus, some companies have a lot to learn about the possibilities offered by virtual working, for example, different collaboration tools. (Kane et al., 2021.) The COVID-19 context highlights specific characteristics in virtual working. Chamakiotis et al. (2021) mention that virtual working, especially when happening due the pandemic, has special characteristics. The virtual teams have diverse employees, including those who have not previously worked virtually either due their own willingness or due the company's policies. Also, the employees in virtual teams have had to organize their own working environment including setting up their own computers, software, and networks to be able to compute their work tasks because the companies were not prepared to offer those for them. In addition, the working environment has become more complex for many as instead of working in the office in a peaceful space, they now have to adjust to working in a place that has more disruptions and tension due to perhaps having their spouses, children, or roommates in the same space with them.

### 2.1.2 Hybrid work

Before the pandemic, traditional offices were seen as places where work was done. (Fayard et al., 2021). However, the working methods shifted, and the pandemic drove people to manage new different working methods to work more virtually (Bloom, 2021). As the post-pandemic way of working turned to more virtual and collocated work changed to a secondary option for employees for routine work (Fayard et al., 2021). Hopkins and Figaro (2021) state that a hybrid workplace is one where traditional on-site working and virtual working are mixed together and where employees can exploit them both by coming into the office occasionally and other times working virtually from a location of their choice. Generally, the communication and information technologies enable to do most of the work virtually from home or elsewhere. Hence, hybrid working is a common way to do the work. Organizations utilize variously hybrid model as working from home or in the company office. (Fayard et al., 2021.)

Therefore, when working virtually, companies should evaluate the effect on information sharing. It is virtually possible to share a lot of information through information systems, regardless of the space where you work. Nevertheless, some information cannot be shared but must be experienced on the spot. For example, it is easier for new employees to learn by observing and following their colleagues around them and learning how the work should be done. Hence, companies are not entirely disposing offices because going to an office is also more than just doing work and technology cannot completely replace social encounters. (Fayard et al., 2021.)

Liu et al. (2020) find that hybrid work, where presence at the office is required a few days a week, seems to create the best balance between the virtual and on-site work as the virtual work provides flexibility, but on-site work has the advantages of collaborating with management and co-workers in person. Wiatr and Skowron-Mielnik (2022) note that after the pandemic, more employees want to work in hybrid mode, and companies have become more flexible in that regards. Thus, opportunities for flexible work arrangements have been increasingly visible in the discussion of work-life balance.

Ferrel and Kelsey (2018) also highlight flexibility as an essential assistance to employee satisfaction.

A survey conducted by Gallup, an international analytics and advice company, in 2022 with a survey sample of 7 762 U.S. full-time workers revealed employees' preferences regarding hybrid working. 53% of employees who are able to work virtually assume hybrid arrangement possibilities going forward. However, when asked to define the hybrid arrangement, there was no clear answer as the definitions varied based on each respondent and their company, team, and role. Around 40% responded that they want to be able to decide independently how to come and go. 60% said that they wish to have more guidelines on hybrid working, but they could not agree on what is the ideal arrangement regarding how many days of the week employees should be present on-site or which weekdays should be those at on-site. The survey also revealed employees' preferences for working in hybrid mode. The most important reason was that it is time-saving as no time is needed to commute to work. The second most important reason was that it increases overall wellbeing, and the third was that it adds flexibility in balancing family needs and other responsibilities. The fourth and fifth most common responses were that hybrid work allows to work in-person with other team members and makes employees feel more constructive and linked to the company.

### **2.1.3 Virtual teams**

Despite multiple definitions, researchers have a consensus that virtual teams tend to refer to teams that are geographically dispersed but work together with the help of technology (see e.g., Järvenpää & Leidner, 1999; Nidiffer & Dolan, 2005). According to Powell, Piccoli & Ives (2004), virtual project teams offer organizations remarkable flexibility and responsiveness. On a practical level, flexibility appears as managers' and organizations' ability to tap into the best resources, regardless of experts' location (Gordon & Curlee, 2011). Moreover, compared to on-site teams, virtual teams are applying different technologies to cut travel and accommodation expenses, reduce

project timelines, and enhance decision-making process (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Geber, 2008). Studies by Dubé and Paré (2001) and Gordon and Curlee (2011) confirm that technology enables online communication in the team.

#### **2.1.4 Virtual team's advantages and challenges**

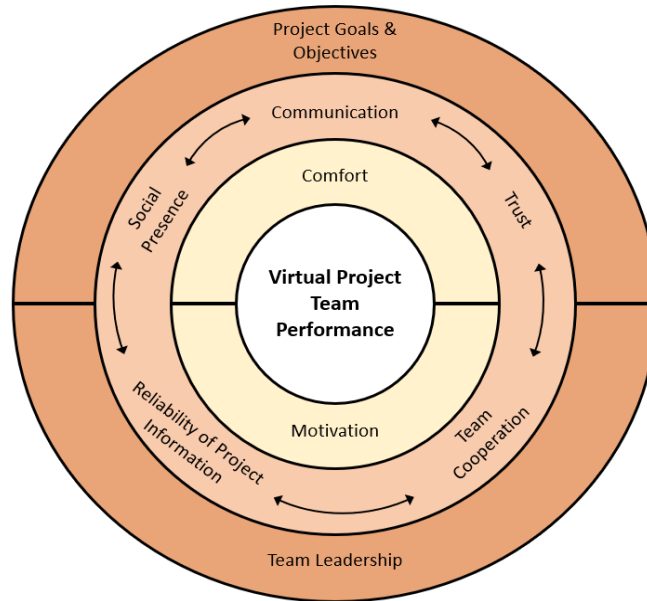
While many researchers have identified the advantages of virtual teams, the success of virtual teams' has yet to be achieved and is often elusive. While virtual teams share some similarities with on-site teams in some areas, technological, temporal, geographical, and cultural differences create challenges for their performance. Examples possess the perceived distance from a colleague or leader (Hanebut, 2015), cultural differences between team members that pose challenges to communication or social interaction (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000), and the technology the team uses daily for activities and communication (Maruping & Agarwal (2004). Virtual teams encounter many challenges that are either absent in on-site teams or have significantly more spillover effects in a virtual or semi-virtual environment (Clark et al., 2019). In their systematic literature review, Clark et al. (2019) analyzed 135 peer-reviewed English journals and found characteristics that were grouped as positive and negative factors of virtual teams' success. These characteristics are summarized in Table 1 below. Based on the analysis, the authors presented three success factors that can be seen as directly linked to virtual teams' success: interpersonal characteristics, trust, appropriateness, and richness of communication technology. Besides the direct success factors, Clark et al. (2019) concluded that geographic and temporal dispersion, effects of cultural diversity including, e.g., spoken language and cultural norms and negative leadership qualities, can directly hinder and cause failure in virtual team performance.

**Table 1.** Positive and negative factors of virtual team's success (Clark et al., 2019).

RANKED POSITIVE FACTORS	RANKED NEGATIVE FACTORS
Factor Group	Factor Group
Interpersonal Characteristics	Dispersion
Trust	Cultural Diversity
Communication	Leader Qualities
Technology	Team Characteristics
Intra-team Relationships	Intra-team Relationships
Leadership Activities	Cultural Characteristics
Collaboration	Commitment
Team Characteristics	Leadership Structure
Communication Characteristics	Interpersonal Characteristics
Knowledge Transfer	Communication Characteristics
Synchronicity	Communication Technology
Leadership Structure	Synchronicity
Communication Structure / Guidelines	
Empowerment/Autonomy	
Satisfaction	
Leader Qualities	
Commitment	
Task Structure / Guidelines	
Dispersion	
Intercultural	
Leadership Training	
Cultural Characteristics	
Cultural Diversity	

### 2.1.5 Virtual team's success factors

To succeed with virtual teams, Dude and Marnewick (2016) suggest a conceptual model to enhance and determine the performance of virtual teams that is presented below in Figure 2. The authors argue that motivation and a sense of belonging to a team with effective communication, trust-building, reliability, social presence, strong leadership, and suitable team characteristics can enhance performance in virtual teams. The model proposes that these dimensions are interrelated but essential for virtual teams to function optimally.



**Figure 2.** A conceptual model for improving performance in virtual project teams. (Dude & Marnewick, 2016).

Individual motivation and the comfort of belonging to a team form the base for virtual team performance. Peterson (2007) emphasizes that motivation comes from within each team member and encourages individuals to pursue their goals and objectives. The view is supported by Lurey and Raisinghan (2001), according to whom the productivity of a virtual team decreases if the individual virtual team members feel unmotivated. To encourage team members to perform above the average, Peterson (2007) suggests that leaders must comprehend the significance of individuality among team members, foster motivation, and take the time to understand what motivates each team member (Peterson, 2007). Furthermore, on the individual level, Dinsmore and Cabanis-Brewin (2014) have emphasized the team members feeling at ease when working in a virtual environment. The literature implies that it is much easier for team members to interact with one another once they are in their comfort zone.

After setting the necessary conditions for an individual virtual team member to succeed, attention shifts to the dimensions that embrace the overall performance of the virtual

team. Settle-Murphy (2013) states that communication technology usage should be the priority consideration for a virtual team leader. Communication is at the core of virtual team effectiveness, and several studies have revealed that communication has played a crucial role in teams' success in achieving desired objectives (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Gordon & Curlee, 2011; Settle-Murphy, 2013; Wise, 2013). In a virtual environment, especially the accessibility of information takes center stage as the team members are not able to share and transfer the information in person (Wise, 2013). However, Gordon & Curlee (2011) point out that leaders in a virtual environment must be particularly sensitive to interpersonal communication and cultural dynamics. The literature concluded that to enhance the performance of virtual teams, it is critical to assess the quality, frequency, feedback, and dependability of shared information. A two-way dialogue between team members and the leader fosters trust (Gordon & Curlee, 2011).

Several studies (Gordon & Curlee, 2011; Greiner & Metes, 2005) have shown that a lack of trust contributes to a team's failure to achieve its objectives. Thus, trustworthiness is critical for virtual teams' effectiveness and efficiency. Wise (2013) and Gordon and Curlee (2011) justify the vital importance of trust through the geographically dispersed location of team members and the missing social context that otherwise arises in face-to-face interactions. While working virtually, the leader's role is emphasized, and the need for positive outcomes is highlighted as negative statements from the leader can nullify the positive contributions of team members, diminish team morale and performance, and unintentionally compromise the trust between the leader and the virtual team (Dude & Marnewick, 2016). Moreover, trust is the primary aspect driving team cooperation (Rad & Levin, 2006; Wise, 2013). It is expected that when the team is new, there can also be challenges with cooperation, but as trust and communication develop, cooperation between team members improves. The study by Driskell et al. (2003) demonstrated that performance in on-site and virtual teams enhances team cooperation but is most significant in virtual project teams as it impacts team commitment.

Reliability of information is another element that contributes to virtual team performance. According to Gordon and Curlee (2011), reliable information is accurate and free from errors or biases. Similarly, Järvenpää & Leidner (1999) indicate that communicated information must be consistent and verifiable. This supports team members in comprehending the nature of the task, project expectations, and ways to achieve the desired objectives.

Finally, social presence can be shown to influence virtual team performance. Social presence is determined by team members' emotional likeness, mutual understanding, and interactions with others. Social interaction in a virtual project group creates the impression that team members engage in joint communicative contact. The leader is in a crucial role in establishing a common language for team members across functional, cultural, organizational, and geographical boundaries, preferably at an early stage. All team members must communicate effectively in the agreed-upon language, as highlighted by Koster (2010). Furthermore, team members must possess the necessary technical competencies and be adept at using current communication technology to execute their tasks proficiently.

To make a virtual teamwork and develop in all five dimensions, the team also needs strong leadership and clear goals. Traditional leadership principles are equally effective for building and maintaining team cooperation in virtual teams. Virtual team leaders should lead by example, prioritize team members' interests, and earn their confidence and trust (Dude & Marnewick, 2016). Goncalves (2005) emphasizes that leaders function as intermediates between the team and individuals, necessitating empathy and awareness of the team's sentiments. Similarly, Gordon and Curlee (2011) agree that to thrive, leaders must have a clear vision and the capacity to communicate that vision to team members passionately. Leaders are ultimately responsible for inspiring a team, defining team goals and vision, developing trust, and preparing team members to engage positively in the virtual team project. (Dude & Marnewick, 2016). Employees expect from the leader that the leader understands employees having the expertise and

knowledge required for their own job and role. The fact that leaders give employees the opportunity to take independent responsibility and make fast decisions when needed. (Poulsen & Ipsen, 2017.)

### **2.1.6 Hybrid teams**

Wiatr and Skowron-Mielnik (2022) mention that a hybrid team has conventionally been described as a combination of on-site and virtually working employees, but as the term has evolved, it now contains employees who divide their time between working on-site and virtually. Mitchell and Brewer (2022) define a hybrid team as a team that has both, face-to-face contacts as well as virtual cooperation. Hybrid teams, however, may differ on their hybrid-form as some teams might see each other every week while others only see each other rarely for example due to their different geographical locations.

Mitchell and Brewer (2022) note that hybrid teams face similar challenges compared to both, on-site teams (e.g., poor planning and/or leadership) and virtual teams (e.g., miscommunication and/or trust). Yet, they still face challenges that apply only to them. For instance, hybrid teams may battle with the development of the team if not having enough time for face-to-face cooperation which may critically reduce the team's performance. A consequence of this could be a decrease in communication among team members, sharing of knowledge, ability to make decisions, and managing conflicts. Another challenge that only applies to hybrid teams is that working in a hybrid team may lead to a situation where subsets are formed, for example based on working locations, and they drift apart causing tension build-ups or conflicts.

## **2.2 Leadership in virtual and hybrid context**

### **2.2.1 Virtual leadership**

Virtual leadership has often been featured in various leadership studies. Already at the turn of the century, there has been a lot of research on virtual leadership, after which the literature has explored what virtual leadership is. Internet, e-mail, video conferencing and virtual teams, *the advanced information technology* (AIT) have been developed since the late-20th century and have since enabled significant changes in companies. Constantly, technology is evolving and enabling companies to progress their operations. Thus, technology has also contributed to diversity of the way of work and leadership. In virtual leadership, studies have emerged on the topic of how AIT affects leadership and leadership functions. (Avolio et al., 2014.)

Virtual leadership is managing teams through a remote work environment. The emphasis in virtual leadership is on motivating and assisting the team to achieve the goals even in the traditional leadership from the office. However, leading remotely occurs through virtual channels, so it requires different skill sets and understanding on how to manage from leaders. While virtual teams allow more flexibility, it also poses new challenges for leadership (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Therefore, the need for leadership has not diminished but instead, its importance has become more significant. The literature, however, on virtual leadership and virtual working is limited. Avolio et al. (2014) note that virtual leadership has not been examined massively yet. Therefore, Cortellazzo et al. (2019) remind that the definition of virtual leadership is still being argued, and no common ground has been founded yet.

It is commonly acknowledged that the prerequisite for efficient and durable virtual teams is leadership (see e.g., Contreras et al. 2020 and Larson & DeChurch 2020). With the new era of virtual working, the expectations, and qualities to succeed in terms of leadership have shifted. Van Wart et al. (2019) point out that even though a lot of the leadership skills needed in the on-site and virtual environments are connected, the skills

still differ remarkably, and those differences are the ones determining the outcome. The skills that are crucial for success in a virtual environment include great virtual communication and social skills as well as good team building and change management skills in a virtual environment. In addition, being trustworthy and having strong technical skills are also considered as good assets to have. Those qualities, among other commonly listed ones, are presented in the next chapters.

As discussed, virtual leadership does not come without challenges. When leading a team virtually, it is hard to develop efficient and independent (Cortellazzo et al., 2019), and devoted teams (Politis, 2014). Different geographical locations also create challenges. Virtual team members work from different locations meaning that the face-to-face interactions are close to none (Malhotra et al., 2007). Meetings and task coordination can also be challenging if the team members work in different time zones (Siebdrat et al., 2014). Trust can be hard to build within virtual teams because leadership is impacted by a national culture which can create obstacles when having different geographical and cultural backgrounds (Gupta & Patnak, 2018). Communication may also be more difficult. The possibility for miscommunication is greater as when not communicating face-to-face, there is a danger that the message will be misunderstood due to not being able to reflect on one's emotions and expressions (Snellman, 2014). Communication overload can also become dominant due to the growth of e-mail use, which has raised the leaders' demands (Rennecker & Derks (2012).

### **2.2.2 Virtual leadership success factors**

Virtual leadership highlights leaders' management and decision-making skills and assigns goals (Li et al., 2016). In virtual work, leaders need to be open-minded for innovation and new technological possibilities but also participate in continuous development. (Li et al., 2016) Success in leadership also emphasizes the leader's personal skills and strengths. The leaders should be an easily approachable and empathetic person. The leaders should also show interest and caring toward the team

and its members. Additionally, in remote working, leaders are expected to have excellent listening skills and to be able to read nonverbal communication and unspoken messages. (Poulsen & Ipsen, 2017)

Many researchers (see e.g., Germain & McGuire, 2014; Panteli & Tucker, 2009) highlight that one of the most important qualities when managing a virtual team is developing trust among the team members. Hacker et al. (2019) add that besides building trust among the virtual team members, trust is also needed to be built between the virtual team members and the leaders themselves. Wright et al. (2014) note that an element of trust involves making sure that the work-life balance is not disturbed in virtual communications. Another element, stated by Snellman (2014), is that trust in a virtual setting is built by providing a safe environment for everybody in which diversity and cultural differences are considered and respected in the same way as they are in on-site environment.

Gibson et al. (2014) highlight the importance of leaders being able to create a safe working environment for everyone from diverse backgrounds that is simultaneously meaningful and collective. Cortellazzo et al. (2019) note that leaders should create an environment where the employees are confident enough to bring up their ideas which lets them contribute to decision-making. A better working environment also leads to better teamwork and cooperation, and responsibility and independence within each team member. Edmondson (1999) adds that part of a safe environment is that everyone is allowed to make mistakes and trying is encouraged. Gibson and Gibbs (2006) note that a safe environment also reduces virtual work and leadership challenges. Schwarzmüller et al. (2018) remind that in a good and safe working environment, companies profit from employees' good performance and also, the need of supervision is decreased.

Cowan (2014) finds that in successful virtual leadership, leaders need to ensure that the distance does not become an obstacle by creating a virtual presence. Panteli et al. (2019) highlight the importance of efficient use of resources which has been shown to improve

employees' work engagement. Wakerfield et al. (2008) highlight that virtual team leaders play a central role in fostering positive team interactions and minimizing the negative ones, such as team discords. Malhotra et al. (2007) note that the leaders also help in creating instructions for the team about the ways of communicating and coordinating tasks within the team.

Lin et al. (2008) highlight the importance of communication clarity when managing a team remotely through virtual channels. Roman et al. (2019) continue that for virtual leadership to be efficient, leaders should communicate clearly and encourage social interactions. Cowan (2014) adds that in virtual leadership, leaders need to acquire excellent communication skills so that they can select the right communication tools, communicate in the right way by taking into consideration the team's cultural differences, and give positive feedback as well as give recognition from a great performance. Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) remind that when leaders promote interpersonal communication instead of task-focused one, it helps in building trust and togetherness. In addition, Schwarzmüller et al. (2018) state that it is essential for virtual leaders to create cross-cultural skills to gain an understanding of diverse cultures, including their commonalities and distinctions.

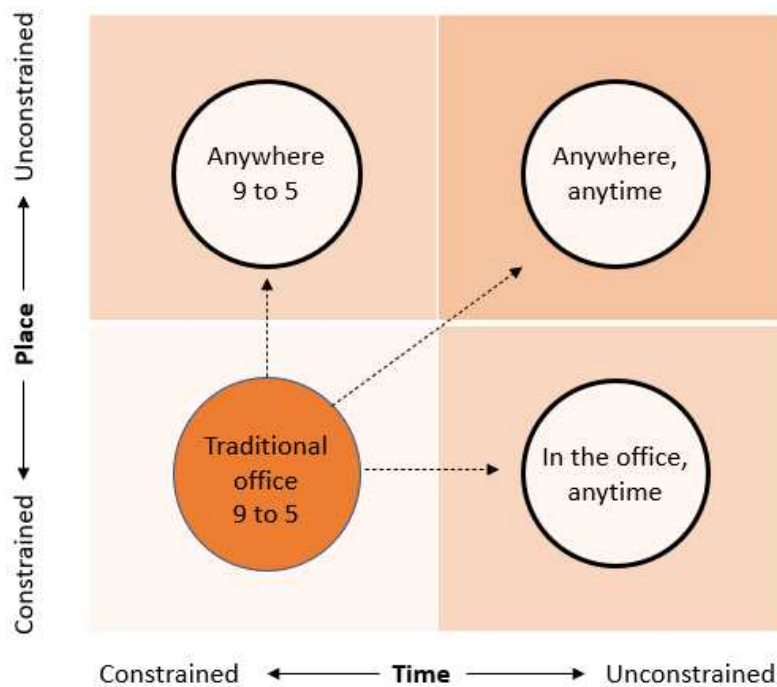
### **2.2.3 Hybrid leadership**

The role of a leader has changed with hybrid work (Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2022). Hopkins and Figaro (2021) note that leaders have faced challenges with merging employees who work on-site and employees who work virtually and have started to realize that a hybrid model is a prerequisite for a functional workplace where employees have different needs. The focus should now be aimed towards the employees and their needs (Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2022). Hence, if leaders want to implement a hybrid model successfully, hybrid work arrangements should consider individual human differences instead of just focusing on institutional issues (Gratton, 2021). Hybrid and virtual leaders and employees meet challenges that are more considerable compared to

those leading or working in an on-site environment (see e.g., Ferrel & Kline, 2018; Owens & Khazanchi, 2018). The return to workplaces has given leaders the opportunity to re-evaluate working methods both remotely and colocated and what kind of hybrid work environment is most effective. Hence, leaders need to estimate how to compound virtual work and colocated work. (Kane et al., 2021.)

Gratton (2021) highlights that both time and place are vital to consider in hybrid leadership and designing hybrid work. The significance of place in hybrid work has become more apparent. Due to the pandemic, millions of workers around the world suddenly transitioned from working in an office to working virtually from a place of their choice to prevent the spread of the virus. Regarding time, less attention has been paid to it, but earlier working synchronously at the same time with others has been shifted in the hybrid model to working without time constraints asynchronously.

To visualize the two-dimensional nature of the hybrid model, Gratton's 2 x 2 matrix demonstrates in Figure 3 below the change of the place and time in the work arrangements. As pre-pandemic working from 9 to 5 used to be the standard, with employers offering very minimal flexibility in where and when employees worked. That approach has been upended by the pandemic, and leaders acknowledge that employees can now work efficiently anywhere, at any time. The pre-pandemic situation is demonstrated in the matrix's lower-left quadrant that employees work in the office with prescribe hours. On the other hand, the lower-right quadrant illustrates the possibility of flexible working hours, and the upper-left quadrant expresses the possibility of flexibility to work whenever to want. Ultimately, the upper-right quadrant demonstrates the hybrid model, working anywhere and anytime. (Gratton, 2021.)



**Figure 3.** Hybrid model - Place & Time (Gratton, 2021).

However, the nature of the hybrid model is evolving, and companies have acknowledged that flexible working arrangements can enhance productivity and employee satisfaction (Gratton, 2021). Despite that, Bloom (2021) argues that complete flexibility for employees in choosing their work arrangements is not the most ideal. This emphasizes the leader's responsibility in planning and optimizing work arrangements for the team and its stakeholders to be suitable. Gratton (2021) also emphasizes planning work in the hybrid model, which should consider the different needs of employees also depending on their working conditions. Consequently, the hybrid model needs to be viewed from different perspectives – for example, from *“jobs and tasks, employee preferences, projects and workflows, and inclusion and fairness”* perspectives – to ensure an effective hybrid model. Also, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a place, people, and time is important, and it should be used when managing teams toward their goals (Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2022). Similarly, Mitchell and Brewer (2022) agree that the recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of each place and time is the key, and those observations need to be used for the team to reach its goals. For instance, virtual work's

strengths include helping employees to concentrate and being very productive. Then, on-site work has such a strength as providing a social environment for employees and giving them a place to cooperate and work together in person.

In every job and task, it is essential to determine the critical productivity drivers, for example, energy, focus, coordination, and cooperation. After that, it needs to be considered how the drivers affect the time and place in different tasks. However, productivity and performance differ with every employee's individual preference. (Gratton, 2021.) Thus, Hopkins and Figaro (2021) point out that employees have different preferences when deciding where they wish to work. As some employees want to work fully virtually, others want to be present on-site as they fear that not showing their faces is an obstacle to promotions. Many prefer to combine the benefits of them both. (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021.) Working conditions at home may also affect the preferences of where to work. A family person who has a good and quiet home office, but a long commute, prefers to work more often virtually, saving time on commuting and focusing on working in peace while the children are at school and daycare. On the other hand, a young person who works in a restless urban environment and lives with roommates prefers to work more often in an office to enable to focus on work. Hence, the importance of employee preferences needs to accumulate within the hybrid model. Therefore, when aiming to define the hybrid work arrangements suitable for the team and individuals, it is good to consider, for example, the following questions: *"What are the risks to the safety, security, and effectiveness of operations? How will changes affect collaboration, leadership, and culture? What might the overall effects be when it comes to taxes, compliance, and external reputation?"* (Gratton, 2021.) If the employee could work virtually, it is more likely that the employee will choose virtual work. When the employee chooses to go to the office, it is usually based on tasks that require physical presence or cooperation (Kane et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, it is crucial in order to succeed in the hybrid model to think about how the work gets done. As the team is working at different times and places, the leader should

pay attention to coordination. Gratton (2021) highlights coordination to increase the utilization of technology and different digital tools. Practically, leaders can utilize different tools to analyze workload, working conditions, and confirm work projections, for example. (Gratton, 2021.) Additionally, digital tools can also enable communication in cooperation, where employees can announce when they are at the office on a certain day of the week. This also helps organizations maintain workspace data and enables leaders to see how they could influence the adoption of hybrid work, in which both remote and office working are utilized. (Kane et al., 2021.) Overall, in planning and elaborating on hybrid work practices, it is pivotal pay attention to inclusion and fairness. The feeling of unfairness can reduce productivity, increase fatigue, impede cooperation, and lower employee retention rates. Ultimately, Gratton summarizes the hybrid model process to seven phases that are demonstrated in the Figure 4 below (Gratton, 2021).



**Figure 4.** How to do hybrid right (Gratton, 2021).

#### 2.2.4 Hybrid team leadership strategy

The post-pandemic situation has grown pressure on the companies and the leaders to plan future working arrangements. Moreover, most of the companies have chosen a hybrid model to operate, typically three days at the office and two at home. Bloom (2021)

states that for the leader's, it is essential to have a strategy for hybrid work, instead of just learning during the work. Mitchell and Brewer (2022) also note that leading hybrid teams efficiently demands a skill set of its own kind to reduce the faced obstacles and increase the team's potential. They agree that hybrid leadership also requires strategic planning to succeed. Additionally, they note that hybrid leadership is not only mixing together on-site and virtual leadership. Hybrid leadership requires constant support for hybrid work culture and cooperation, which demands time and money. Hence, the following eight hybrid leadership strategies can be used for successful team leadership. These are also summarized in table 2 below. The table also presents critical questions to guide the leadership of hybrid teams which leaders can utilize and follow in planning the hybrid work.

**Table 2.** Critical questions to guide the leadership of hybrid teams (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022).

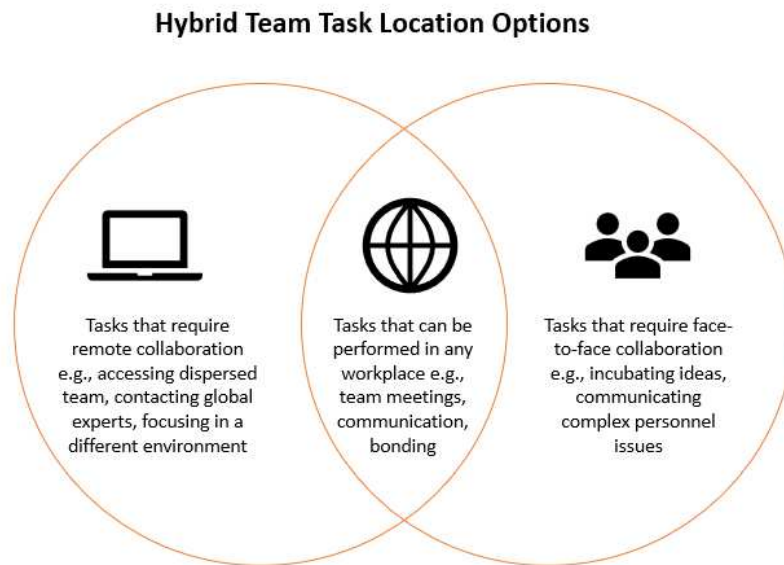
Hybrid team leadership strategy	Critical questions
1. Establish a flexible and effective work environment, and trust team member choices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do team members have flexibility and agency to work from office and/or remotely?</li> <li>• Do team members have reliable, non-disruptive spaces and resources for individual and collaborative work both from the office and from their remote locations?</li> <li>• Have policies and best practices for hybrid work been shared?</li> <li>• Have teams established clear boundaries/roles? Do they feel confident relying on one another?</li> <li>• Have team leaders or managers achieved a successful balance of task tracking and support?</li> <li>• Is leadership modeling hybrid collaboration expectations</li> </ul>
2. Communicate through multiple channels, emphasizing remote first.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do all team members have access to the same communication whether in office or not?</li> <li>• Do messages go out via multiple communication channels (e.g., email, chat, discussion boards, groupware, etc.)?</li> <li>• Are team members receiving messages in a timely manner?</li> <li>• Are read receipts or other methods for message acknowledgement used?</li> </ul>
3. Clarify purpose and use the right collaboration tool for the task.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the team discussed collaboration expectations (e.g., location, technology preferences, feedback expectations, timing, etc.)?</li> <li>• Do team members have access to multiple technology capabilities and tools (e.g., phone, email, text chat, discussion forums, video collaboration, groupware, etc.)?</li> <li>• Are intentional decisions made regarding what tasks need to happen f2f vs. remotely?</li> <li>• Do teams always default to the same mode? Or use a variety of modes and tools?</li> </ul>
4. Be deliberate about asking for team feedback on needs, roadblocks, and feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do team members have an opportunity to reflect and share any needs, roadblocks, or feelings either virtually or f2f?</li> <li>• Are multiple channels for team feedback used (e.g., 1-on-1, group reflection, surveys, etc.)?</li> <li>• Are team member challenges not only gathered but also addressed?</li> <li>• Is team member wellness prioritized</li> </ul>
5. Monitor team ties and create opportunities for strengthening work relationships and team bonding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are team members able to identify common purpose and collaborate regardless of location?</li> <li>• Do team subgroups exist or are signs of subgroups and team tensions emerging?</li> <li>• Do teams have multiple opportunities to develop social connections?</li> <li>• Are teams primarily task-oriented or are they having fun too?</li> </ul>
6. Reserve inclusive synchronous collaboration time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have teams prioritized a regular synchronous meeting with high responsiveness to serve as the heartbeat of team? Or are team members left to their own devices to solve problems?</li> <li>• Are meetings inclusive and in the same mode for everyone (as much as possible)?</li> <li>• Does synchronous meeting time allow for problem solving and spontaneous brainstorming?</li> <li>• Does meeting time work for all members to stay regularly connected and in sync?</li> </ul>
7. Prepare and share meeting agendas and goals, planning for meeting inclusivity and productivity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a meeting agenda (with goals) been created and distributed ahead of the meeting time allowing attendees time to prepare?</li> <li>• Do team members know where the meeting is going to be (f2f or remote) and is it accessible and supported? Is it clear how both f2f and remote participants will be included? Excluded?</li> <li>• Are meeting invites sent out using electronic calendar tools with reminders turned on?</li> <li>• Have organization policies or cultural norms been developed to guide team meetings? If so, is the meeting on track? If not, what norms might be followed (e.g., casual conversation, starting on time, tracking assignments, summarizing action items, ending on time)?</li> <li>• Are key messages repeated through multiple methods (e.g., audibly, visually, etc.)?</li> <li>• Are meeting attendees asked for input or feedback through multiple channels (e.g., verbally, written, small or large group contributions, etc.)?</li> </ul>
8. Recognize and reward team and individual achievements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are team members aware of how their performance is tracking in relation to individual and/or team goals?</li> <li>• Do all team members have the opportunity to be recognized?</li> <li>• Are teams recognized, acknowledged, or celebrated via multiple channels (e.g., virtual and in-person announcements, reviews, incentives, or monetary rewards, etc.) for successes?</li> </ul>

The first strategy is called *“Establish a flexible and effective work environment and trust team member choices”*. Leaders need to shift from a traditional on-site-only concept to a hybrid concept. (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022.) This means that physically at the office, there needs to be places, such as meeting rooms, where the team can work even if some team members are connected virtually. (Gratton, 2021 and Mitchell & Brewer, 2022.) This also means that physically the hardware and software need to be in place in the office as well as in the virtual working place. Also, online space, such as forums and video tools, should be established so that team can easily co-operate together. In addition to creating a functional work environment, leaders need to consider where the team prefers to work. This is best done by asking about the employees’ preferences and trusting their choices. This includes deciding together whether some types of work will better be done when at the office. When employees are included in decision-making, they will best adopt the practices. (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022.)

The second strategy is called *“Communicate through multiple channels, emphasizing remote first”*. This relates to a problem where something that has been said in the office does not reach everyone’s ears. (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022.) Lipnack and Stamps (2008) emphasize in leadership the vital role of communication in both collocated and virtual working. That is why communication channels need to be established, which include everyone so that everybody has the same knowledge regardless of the working place. Communication should always be done on a virtual-first basis. This means that those working in virtual settings should be taken into consideration very carefully and ensure that they at least share the same knowledge as everyone else. Using the proper communication channels is important for this to succeed. These could include the use of e-mails, instant chats, video meeting tools, and others that fit for the particular team. When done correctly, hybrid teams may become more inclusive compared to teams working in person. (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022.)

The third strategy is *“Clarify purpose and use the right collaboration tool for the task”*. As the hybrid teams can work in a virtual setting or in person when meeting on-site, it is

the leader’s task to divide which work tasks should be conducted in each environment. To be able to make the best decision, leaders need to understand the characteristics of each task and what is needed to perform it. Figure 5 below illustrates the location options for team members. (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022.)



**Figure 5.** Hybrid Team Task Location Options (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022).

Choosing the right tool for each task is essential for it to be as efficient as possible. For instance, if a team conflict needs to be solved, video meetings can be a better tool than trying to solve it via e-mail. On the other hand, if straightforward questions need to be answered, e-mail or instant chats might be better tools than video meetings so that employees do not get too tired from sitting in multiple meetings throughout the day. Hybrid team leaders play an important role in creating team norms and habits regarding the right technology and communication. (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022.)

The fourth strategy is called *“Be deliberate about asking for team feedback on needs, roadblocks, and feelings”*. Depending on the individual, hybrid work may add or decrease the amount of stress and exhaustion. Thus, it is important that leaders ask about the

team's feelings often so that they know how the employees are doing. Leaders should encourage the team members to be open and honest about their situation. It is irrelevant whether the checking is done virtually or in person, as long as it is the best way for the employee. (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022.)

The fifth strategy is *"Monitor team ties and create opportunities for strengthening work relationships and team bonding"*. Some challenges regarding hybrid work are the forming of subsets within the team and the lack of trust within the team and between the team and the leader. There are, however, tools to fix these challenges or at least to reduce them. Leaders should ensure the idea of the team working together towards the same goal and having the same team purpose. Also, leaders must provide chances where the team bond and work relationships can be strengthened. The best way to do this is by having fun together. By doing this, team health, trust, and commitment can be promoted, which further leads to a better work efficiency. (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022.)

The sixth strategy is called *"Reserve inclusive synchronous collaboration time"*. Synchronous communication is the best way to communicate and reach goals. That is why time should often be reserved for this. In order for this to happen, leaders should intentionally plan meetings at times that work for everyone. These synchronous meetings can happen virtually, in person, or in the mix of these two. While having these meetings, teams can solve problems or brainstorm together. The meetings can be as simple as morning coffee chats or more formal meetings. (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022.)

The seventh strategy is called *"Prepare and share meeting agendas and goals, planning for meeting inclusivity and productivity"*. In this strategy, creating efficient meeting practices is important so that the collective time in meetings can be used productively. A clear agenda is essential with specified action items and goals for the meeting. Leaders should also decide whether the meeting will be held virtually or on-site. However, either one of these choices should be chosen as in a situation where most of the employees are on-site but only one is connected through a virtual device, it might be more

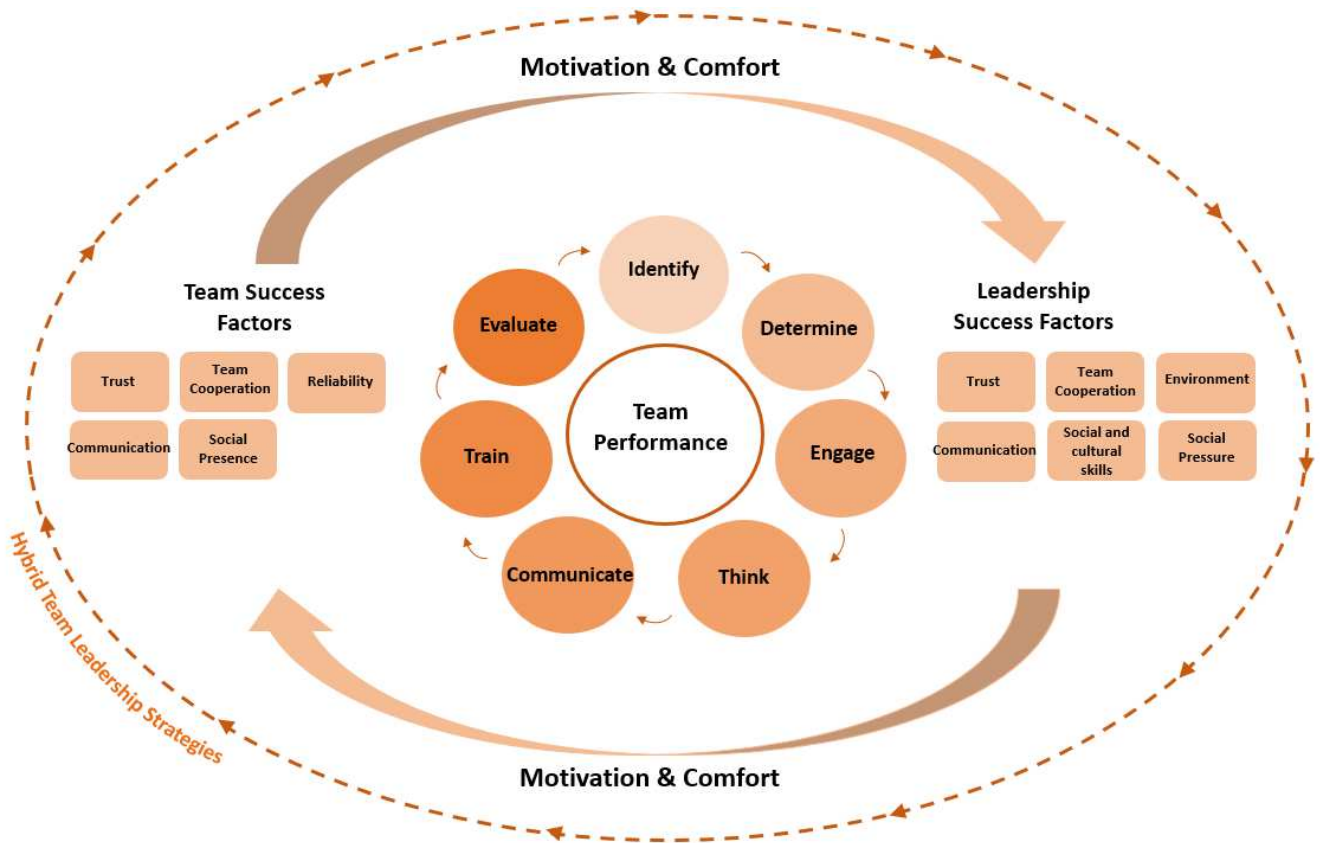
challenging for that one person to participate, which leads to an unequal meeting experience. Meetings should also be recorded, or transcriptions should be used so that if attendees participating virtually get disconnected (e.g., due to a bad connection), they still know what has been said or agreed. Having these could also be good when making sure that everybody has understood the things said, especially if a team consists of multi-lingual employees. (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022.)

The eighth and last strategy is called *“Recognize and reward team and individual achievements”*. In a hybrid setting, when spending time a lot in virtual mode, employees might get forgotten, or at least they might fear so, as their faces are not regularly seen at the office. Not being constantly present may also complicate employees’ evaluations. To better evaluate hybrid teams and employees, the evaluations should focus more on deliverables and results, not on interactions and time measurements. The reward announcements in a hybrid setting should also be different and they can be done via using virtual channels such as companies’ intra-websites or virtual shot-outs or done in person when everyone is at the office. (Mitchell & Brewer, 2022.)

### **2.3 Theoretical framework: The hybrid model**

In Gratton's (2021) research regarding exceptional work arrangements due to Covid-19, the interviews with leaders have emphasized the potential of a hybrid model in the workplace. If properly applied, the hybrid model is seen as making work more meaningful, productive, agile, and adaptable.

The theoretical framework of this study, presented in the Figure 6, connects the team and leadership success factors with the drivers of motivation and comfort. In the framework, the team performance acts as a focal point with the hybrid model process, which is surrounded by team and leading success factors. Overall, this entity surrounds and moves forward with hybrid team leadership strategies. In addition, the different areas work in constant interaction with each other.

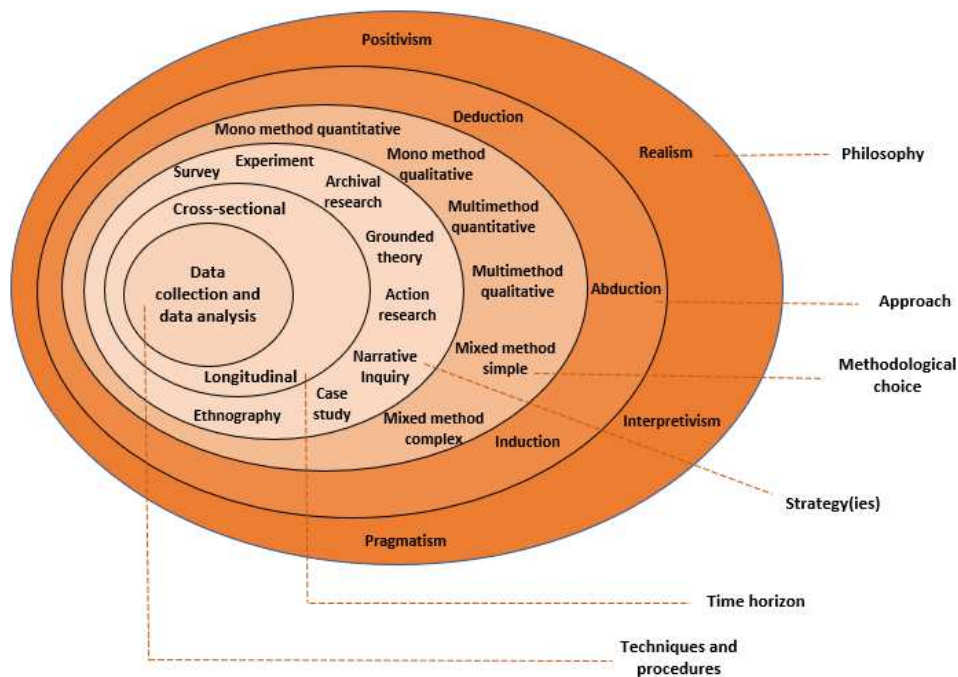


**Figure 6.** Theoretical framework.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Research strategy and method

Empirical research is grounded in theoretical research methods that have been refined over time. One critical factor for ensuring the quality of a research study is its methodological fit, as emphasized by Edmondson and McManus (2007). The research onion framework can be utilized to describe the methodological approach taken in the thesis. The research onion proposed by Saunders et al. (2019) comprises six layers or stages that must be completed to develop a practical methodology (see Figure 7). In particular, the research onion model allows researchers develop a research strategy by defining all of the essential stages.



**Figure 7.** Research onion (Saunders et al., 2019).

The first stage in Saunders' (2019) model is the outermost layer, representing four different research philosophies. Hence, this research focuses on interpretivism to enable qualitative research to present new perspectives and a more multidimensional

understanding of the hybrid model. The second stage presents three broader options for the research approach. This study focusses on the abductive method as presenting the theory first and then testing and building the existing theory through the study. Next, the research onion instructs the methodological choice to be done, which means how many data options will be used. In the circumstances of providing a broader understanding of the hybrid model and leading in a hybrid virtual environment, this study selected the mono method – using qualitative interview data and thematic analysis of the data. The fourth layer of the research onion investigates the research more practically. The layer outlines how the research can be done following the study objectives – in other words, the research strategy/ies. In this study, grounded theory aspects are applied to the data collection through thematic interviews, in which case the highest categories of the data are determined based on the theory. According to the fifth layer, time horizon, this study focused on 2022; hence the study utilizes a cross-sectional time horizon. The central point in the research onion is the most practical point where the study is conducted. Thereby, more details of the data collection and analysis in the following sections 3.2 Data collection and 3.3 Data analysis.

### **3.2 Data collection**

Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, which not only gained broad insight into hybrid leadership from the leaders' perspective but also studied team members' perspectives to understand both sides. The process of data collection began with contacting interviewees. A few business representatives were contacted via LinkedIn and email to scan potential interviewees. In the end, there were thirteen suitable interviewees. The author and business contacts then contacted these people and encouraged their participation. All thirteen interviewees were chosen based on their relevance and contribution to the studied phenomenon. The interviewee participants consist of eight leaders and five experts with hybrid model experience and currently working in a hybrid virtual environment. The interviewees worked in different industries in different roles to gather diverse interview material. The interview information is

presented below table 3. Additionally, the interviewee IDs are utilized in the Findings part of this study in connection with interview quotations.

**Table 3.** Interview information

Interviewee	ID	Role in Hybrid model	Position	Industry	Interview duration
1	L1	Leader	Technical Service Manager	ICT	58 min
2	L2	Leader	Guest Service Manager	Cinema	50 min
3	L3	Leader	Operations Manager	Staffing and recruiting	41 min
4	L4	Leader	Chief People Officer	Information management	25 min
5	L5	Leader	Team Lead	Advertising services	61 min
6	L6	Leader	Strategy Manager	Professional services	50 min
7	L7	Leader	Head of Mortgage team	Financial services	57 min
8	L8	Leader	Consulting Unit Manager	Information management	26 min
9	E1	Expert	Specialist	Renewable Energy	41 min
10	E2	Expert	HR Specialist	Retail	36 min
11	E3	Expert	Consultant	Professional services	37 min
12	E4	Expert	Resource Manager	Social and Health Care	66 min
13	E5	Expert	Project Coordinator	Funding services	45 min

Following Saunders et al. (2019) suggestions, the semi-structured format allowed the interviewer to follow interesting themes that emerged during the conversation. The author used an interview guide and a series of open-ended questions to obtain thorough and direct replies from leaders and hybrid team experts to extract information and insights. The interview consists of twenty-five open-ended questions divided into two main categories, leadership in a hybrid work environment and hybrid team (see Appendix 1). Open-ended questions were used to gather comprehensive information on the subject matter, with a conversational and relaxed interviewing style (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

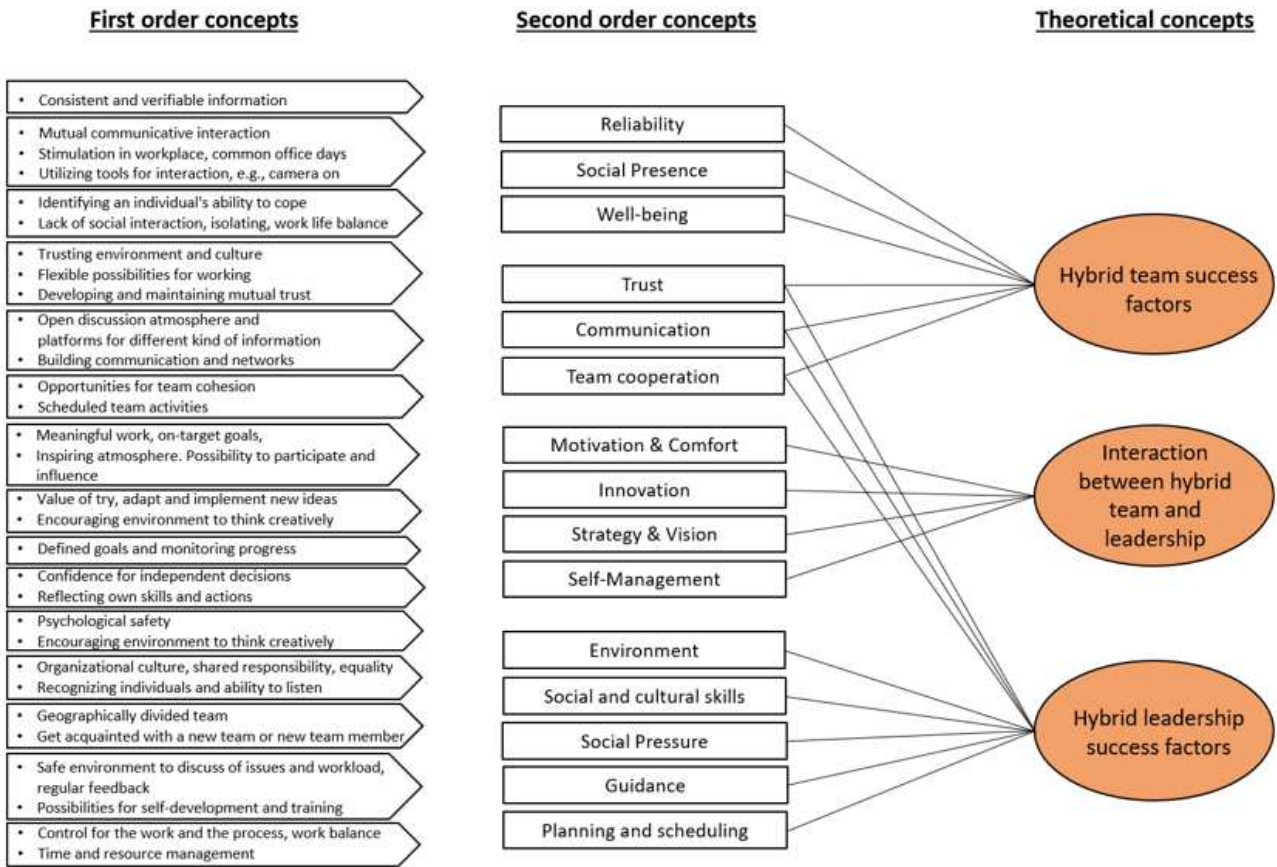
All interviews were executed via Microsoft Teams in March-April 2022, and video recordings were made to ensure validity (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008). The video recording data consisted of 593 minutes, so the average interview lasted 46 minutes. The same themes were covered in each interview in the same order. The interviews were executed in Finnish, the native language of all participants, allowing the author to capture all micro sentiments and emphases.

### **3.3 Data analysis**

The data-collecting process involved recording interviews and then transcribing them. These transcripts served as the foundation for conducting data analysis. Following the completion of an interview, the next stage in data analysis was transcribing the recorded conversation immediately after the interview. The total amount of interview transcripts was 130 pages. As the obtained data were written and interviewed (voice), it was first to read through and, then find connections and divergent experiences of hybrid leadership and team performance. In addition, the analysis is supposed to find new impressions that differ from the pre-defined framework.

Further, transcribing the recorded conversations follows categorizing process (Grodal et al., 2021). This process, in which data is methodically sorted into novel categories, is the foundation for emergent theory (e.g., Golden-Biddle & Locke, 2007; Van Maanen, 2011). In categorizing and outlining the themes in the study, the Gioia method was used to guide the data analysis process (Gioia et al., 2013).

All in all, the aim is to share all the information on key themes and topics. In addition, quotations are supposed to be used to reflect the results. The study presents the emerged themes and topics in the below Figure 8.



**Figure 8.** Analytical coding process using Gioia Methodology.

## 4 Findings

The interviews conducted as part of this study revealed several key themes related to the team and leadership success factors and these interactions, as presented above in Figure 8. Hence this chapter will open up the emerging themes of the interview data. Ultimately, this chapter summarizes the key findings and extended theory framework.

### 4.1 Team success factors

#### 4.1.1 Communication

Effective team communication has emerged as a vital success factor in the setting of hybrid work throughout the interview data, with interviewees underlining the importance of encouraging team collaboration and maintaining an open discussion atmosphere. Many organizations and teams have implemented different channels for specific conversations to facilitate this. According to the interviews, team members have access to various chat forums and channels to engage in discussions with their colleagues. It is desirable to have informal discussions about non-work-related topics in addition to official channels dedicated to work-related matters. Maintaining communication over different channels is critical for keeping a team's social connections, especially when face-to-face encounters are not so often. Hence, teams may stay connected and develop social interactions even when physical contact is impossible by utilizing various communication platforms. This method not only allows for keeping up social connections but also helps individuals with immediate help from others in work-related questions when required and encourages involvement in free-flowing discussions at the appropriate moment.

*“Having separate channels for casual conversation in addition to for work-related discussions is crucial for maintaining a healthy and open communication culture within the team. [...] It also requires from the leader to be able to encourage people into the joint work and open discussion.” (L5)*

*"We have had success using various tools to help with leadership and teamwork. Several tools, for example, can help illustrate and replace in-person interactions a little bit. The use of tools can add value to the dialogue, keeping it alive. For example, our team has its own chat channel, which promotes team cohesion. It is a casual and straightforward channel that attempts to compensate for the fact that face-to-face encounters are not as frequent in the office." (L8)*

The value of communication is observed not only in communication distribution to different channels through its meaning, but its importance is also seen in team cohesion. The interviews highlighted how the daily exchange of information and discussion and the sharing of accomplishments in different channels, help to sustain team cohesiveness and a pleasant work environment. Effective communication assists in comprehending other team members and their roles and understand others' expectations. Effective communication also helps to avoid the emergence of misunderstandings and prevent conflicts. Overall, efficient communication allows a collaborative atmosphere and working towards common goals.

*"I have observed a significant difference within my old team and new team about the communication signification in the team's cohesion. Instead of my old team, the new team utilizes actively the Teams chat platform. It enables initiate conversations and keeps everyone updated about ongoing discussions. This daily exchange of information, experiences, and achievements has created a sense of togetherness among team members. I believe that this platform has significantly influenced this positive atmosphere within the team." (L7)*

On the other hand, physical encounters are also emphasized in communication in a hybrid work environment. The emphasis on virtual work in hybrid working can pose significant challenges for individuals if most of the work is done virtually, and there needs to be more social interaction and communication. Even though communication can be done effectively through different channels, occasionally working at the office can be helpful in preventing team members from feeling isolated and overwhelmed by problems that may arise working virtually alone. Additionally, occasionally meeting face-to-face, provides diversity to communication allowing to mind non-verbal signals, such

as, body gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice, which can also promote communication clarity between the team. Furthermore, face-to-face encounters enable more straightforward relationship-building possibilities and make communication more personal contributing to the common sense of trust.

*"The potential for work-related and personal issues to accumulate without social interaction is the most significant risk of working remotely for individuals who live alone. As a result, it is reasonable to arrange office days together, even if some team members may not think these office days are important. Regular in-person encounters can help prevent feelings of isolation and the accumulation of difficulties." (L7)*

*"It has worked well for us in the team that people will actively visit the office, to avoid only working alone." (L8)*

*"In some ways, the hybrid model has increased efficiency because it allows teams to convene virtually quickly. Working only in a virtual environment, on the other hand, can be quite exhausting" (E4)*

As a hybrid work environment enables working around the globe, it may arise challenges to communication with working in different time zones. Throughout the interviews appeared that teams may be geographically dispersed due to the flexibility of hybrid work or the presence of company locations in various regions of the world. A globally spread team might complicate effective communication in the team and identify mutually agreeable meeting times as working in different time zones. Furthermore, communication challenges might arise within differences of various cultures or language barriers. Moreover, geographically dispersed teams underline the possibility for different technological solutions and tools to ensure effective communication and maintain collaboration and building relationships. Hence, this kind of team communication requires careful planning and organizing.

*"Time zone differences can be difficult, particularly in hybrid work situations. Coordination of schedules, for example, can be difficult when working across continents such as the United States and Europe. Working in teams across multiple time zones, like Asia, Europe, and the United States, is even more difficult because it is nearly impossible to find a time that works well for*

*everyone, and someone always ends up with a very inconvenient schedule.”  
(L4)*

#### **4.1.2 Trust**

Trust appeared as a prominent element in hybrid team performance, according to the interview data. In a hybrid work environment, interviewees underlined the significance of trust between team members and between employees and leaders in guaranteeing successful communication, cooperation, and performance. Hence, trust is an essential element for successful hybrid work arrangements

*“If you do not have trust, it is difficult to get the team interested and involved. It is difficult to offer ownership if there is no trust, and trust must be mutual. Trust is at the heart of everything.” (L4)*

Interview participants noted that the sign of trust in the hybrid work had been apparent before the pandemic. Before the pandemic, certain companies had stricter rules and possibilities for hybrid work. One interviewee highlighted the pre-pandemic situation, which was often a negative perception around working virtually in their company, as employees felt that their employer did not trust them. While there were undoubtedly valid risk management and IT infrastructure concerns that led to restrictions on remote work in the company. Several people interpreted these restrictions as a lack of trust. The lack of trust was escalated because other companies allowed virtual work, making employees feel undervalued and untrusted. Hence, trust is a fundamental element of hybrid work.

Nevertheless, the interviewees highlighted that team members have flexible working conditions in the post-pandemic situation. Thus, employees can flexibly choose whether to work virtually or from the office. Independent work planning also enables employees to work peacefully independently and focus on their own work when needed as prioritizing different tasks to do virtually or on-site.

*“In a hybrid work model, there is the freedom to choose how to complete work tasks, which can lead to the opportunity of working remotely on specific days.*

*This option allows for more focused and concentrated work, enabling employees to enter a flow mood and immerse themselves in tasks requiring their undivided attention.” (L5)*

*“Hybrid work allows individuals to work in own peace when you do not enjoy cooperating all the time.” (L1)*

Trust in employees and independent work also supports flexibility in the working hours. Flexible working hours were highlighted in the interviews, where trust also gives flexibility to employees' everyday life when employees can also organize their working days to suit themselves and also be able to carry out their leisure activities according to their schedule. Additionally, flexible work arrangements enable employees to work from a location of their choice. The flexibility of choosing a flexible working location is affected by the company's policy and regulations on how freely employees can work regardless of location. However, in those companies where the location is freely chosen, it was emphasized that employees have been able to work, for example, from abroad and combine a vacation trip abroad with family or friends simultaneously.

*“We have received very good feedback that it has been so flexible and how nice it has been to be able to work in Lapland, for example. [...] In our team, some prefer to work mainly virtually, while others prefer to be more in the office, but it has not an issue as people enjoys the freedom to choose themselves the way of work.” (L3)*

Trust in allowing flexibility in planning working arrangements also gives flexibility in implementing projects. The interviews stress that common trust promotes accountability for work tasks. Trust is elemental for team members to take responsibility for their work. The fact that there is also trust within the team also helps to succeed in projects. Trust also builds confidence that team members are doing their job and following schedules. Further, through common trust, the team can be flexible with the implementation of the project, which means that additional efforts can be allocated if the project requires it. Thus, the team can also trust that the accumulated working hours

can be utilized after project execution. Hence, shared trust and flexibility also support the team and the company work towards a common goal.

*“Working virtually gives individuals more flexibility in terms of where and when they work. This enables people to accrue flexible hours or balance their work hours. Furthermore, it allows for project flexibility, allowing them to take time off later in the week if they have worked extra hours. This flexibility benefits both employees and the firm by contributing to the achievement of common goals.” (L1)*

#### **4.1.3 Team Cooperation**

Although team cooperation is significant for any work environment cannot argue. All interviewees highlighted the importance of team cooperation, especially in a hybrid work environment. As employees can form hybrid teams through various locations and time zones, it is vital for team performance success that the team works in unison and according to the same purpose.

As the hybrid model enables flexible working arrangements, it is also suitable to consider in the team cooperation and networking possibilities. The interviews revealed that companies provide different tools and platforms, such as Whiteboard and the Teams channel, for the whole office, for example, to support working together, sharing ideas and networking, among others. Various tools nourish cooperation for employees and the possibility to interact. Furthermore, to provide possibility and encourage teams to see others, two interviewees presented their companies' habit sharing information in the Teams channel when they are working at the office. Sharing information on office days stimulates individuals to visit the office as a possibility to see others from another teams. Additionally, the interviewees highlighted that their teams and office tend to have common working days at the office, which also makes it possible to know when there might be co-workers in the office, in which case employees could also take advantage of visiting the office for a common time and to see others.

*“The team has flexible working hours, giving you the freedom to choose the work style that suits you. Virtually working has been found to be good in the team but referring to office days we have our own Teams channel between the departments, where you can notify when you are in the office, so you can also meet with friends at the office. This also guarantees possibilities for networking, as the department has about hundred employees, so it is also possible to maintain cooperation between different teams.” (L1)*

For new employees, connecting swiftly with the entire team in a hybrid work environment can be challenging, especially when face-to-face encounters are infrequent. The interviews highlighted that the extent to which a new member can integrate with the team might depend on their personality and the frequency of virtual or colocated meetings. Additionally, it is a significant challenge when a new employee joins a team and is must to work mostly virtually, especially for tasks that cannot be learned simply by studying but require hands-on experience and learning from others. Hence, it is essential to facilitate interactions between team members to ensure new team members are familiar with the team and the work tasks.

*“Casual conversations during joint lunches or coffee breaks in the office are the easiest ways to connect with others. In our work environment, virtual coffee breaks are held to facilitate interactions between team members, including new employees.” (L5)*

*“When new employees enter to the team, close proximity to the team is necessary to facilitate access to information and support for the new employee. This will enable them to join the team seamlessly and familiarize themselves with the work.” (L7)*

Even though effective collaboration in a hybrid work model can be done through multiple communication channels and establishing common office days it might create division in the teams. Such as, in the interviews highlighted that teams might be divided based on age and preference for working from the office or virtually, which could bring certain team members closer together. It can perceive a clear separation between these two groups, with those in the office having a greater sense of fellowship and sharing of information. At the same time, those who are working virtually are more likely to communicate through virtual platforms such as Teams or Skype.

*“Approximately half of the team consisted of younger individuals who enjoyed working in the office due to the available facilities, ergonomic setup, and social interaction. The remaining team members were experienced and preferred virtual work, as they appreciated the comfort and convenience of working from home without the need to commute.” (L7)*

Additionally, in the office, team members may spontaneously schedule shared activities after work hours, which can cause others feel excluded. Closeness has also been noticed between experienced employees, and team division may result in sparring between experienced colleagues. Such a division may arise when there are long-serving employees with high knowledge and skills compared to their newly hired colleagues. In such instances, it is not uncommon for these experienced colleagues to engage in specialized discussions that may not involve the entire team. These discussions may be characterized by technical jargon and are usually held to address specific technical matters quickly. However, companies have acknowledged the possibilities for team division, encouraging teamwork and scheduling office days to build team cohesion and collaboration.

*“Employees who are physically present in the office on a regular basis have formed a tight-knit group in our organizational setting, which includes persons from multiple teams, whereas those who primarily work virtually may not be as integrated into this core group. We have kept a close eye on this development to avoid the formation of isolated groups, but so far, we have found that this office group dynamic is working well, and everyone is taken into account when visiting the office. Nonetheless, in the end of the day, it makes sense that people in the office may decide to engage in shared activities after work, and someone may then feel excluded and wonder why they are not there. However, we always want to immediately encourage to togetherness as soon as someone feels like an outsider - we are e.g., in situations like this, we thought together whether the person would have the opportunity to visit the office and be there a little more, because we do not want to dismiss the idea that individuals be able to get to know each other and plan activities with each other.” (L3)*

Moreover, a division within the team could also lead to a deficiency in the effective dissemination of information if it is not attended to ensure that information is available regardless of their location, virtually or at the office for all team members.

*“I often found myself in between these two groups, sometimes working virtually and at other times in the office. I noticed that the flow of information was a critical factor in this division, wondering if there was something that team members were missing out on due to their location. This created a sense of importance around ensuring that information was accessible to all team members, regardless of their physical location.” (L7)*

#### **4.1.4 Reliability**

Six interviewees highlighted reliability in the hybrid work. The reliability reflects reliable connectivity to colleagues, e.g., reliable internet connection and connectivity with others. Additionally, employees can rely on other team members to be available online and attend virtual meetings. When the hybrid model relies widely on technology to enable work, communication and collaboration reliability has a vital influence on the hybrid team’s success.

*“Reliability is essential to employees and team performance. In both ways, information flow is smooth when it comes to operative work e.g., accessibility to data or communication between others. Additionally, I feel in hybrid environment it is significant that you can rely that your coworkers show up online and do their responsibilities on time.” (E5)*

#### **4.1.5 Social Presence**

Across multiple interviews, participants consistently emphasized the importance of common days in the office with team members and others. Hence, prioritizing common days at the office with the team is critical for the team and fostering new employees to get to know others. Having common office days improves team cohesion, allows for information sharing, and opens more potential for cooperation and networking. Common office days facilitate unified at the individual, team, and organizational working. In general, employees can flexibly choose where and when they work on an individually. Common office days, on the other hand, boost opportunities for networking and collaboration at the team level, both inside the team and with other

colleagues with whom they otherwise normally would not work. Furthermore, this expands opportunities for new employees to learn about the business, people, and common practices. Moreover, at the organizational level, this encourages collaboration toward common goals and operations following the company's culture. Hence, social presence with common office days fosters team cohesion and collaboration.

*“During the pandemic, three new members entered the team while operating entirely virtually. Thereby, they did not have the possibility often to meet the other team members in person, although they did a few times. The team lacks cohesion despite engaging in frequent dialogue and collaborative tasks. Building a strong sense of fellowship proves challenging, as it is difficult to replicate the bond formed in-person activities with scheduling virtual Teams meetings and conversations. This requires the leader to create the meaning and strive for the in-person moments while meeting the team to utilize these moments.” (L7)*

Additionally, interviewees highlighted that office work provides numerous opportunities for enhanced stimulation in the workplace. For instance, employees can engage in brainstorming, sparring, and casual conversations with colleagues, which are conducive to promoting creativity. This was particularly emphasized in interviews where employees must develop creative innovative solutions for clients, or the work involved in creative work with other team members.

*“Working remotely and in isolation can pose challenges for those tasked with generating new ideas or producing creative content like advertising materials week after week without any external stimulation.” (L5)*

Further, four interviews revealed the importance of social presence in the office in a project context. Meeting face-to-face provides a shared sense of direction and comprehension in project-based work. As hybrid work has increased project flexibility, clients have observed that projects can be carried out virtually, and experts are not tied to the client's workspace. However, interviewees pointed out that meeting with the client in person is a good starting point for launching the project together.

*"Our work involves project-based collaborations with clients, and we find that the most effective way to start a new project is by having an in-person kick-off meeting with the client. This helps to establish a solid relationship and sets the tone for the project." (L8)*

The video connection is also helpful for staying connected to enhance the social presence during meetings. In the interviews, it was brought up that, for example, it is customary to keep the camera on in team meetings and other meetings when the meeting attendants' number is below ten, but of course the presenter usually has the camera on. Interviewees highlight that seeing other people's faces in meetings is convenient and pleasant to keep interacting with others. It is also essential in live meetings, where someone is attending virtually, to get the effort to ensure everyone is involved and cameras are enabled for all to ensure the interactive meeting.

*"The challenge is, for example, that employees often do not prefer to use a camera in a meeting virtually, and the threshold to say something through the mic is more challenging, so employees' presence does not transmit easily to others in the meetings." (E2)*

*"I have aimed to ensure to all the opportunity to voice their thoughts and ideas during the meetings. As, I have engaged all team members to be active on meetings to avoid being passive with cameras of." (L7)*

*"Already, in the beginning of pandemic, we decided to keep cameras always on in teams/zoom meetings. Therefore, somehow, even though you are working virtually, you get the feeling that you know people whom you have never even met." (L4)*

#### **4.1.6 Well-being**

The emphasis on virtual work in hybrid working can pose significant challenges for individuals if most of the work is done virtually, and there needs to be more social interaction. The potential for work-related and personal issues to accumulate without social interaction is the most significant risk of working virtually for individuals who live alone. As a result, it is reasonable to arrange office days together, even if some team

members may not consider these office days important. Regular in-person encounters help prevent feelings of isolation and the accumulation of difficulties. Hence, occasionally working at the office can help prevent team members from feeling isolated and overwhelmed by problems that may arise while working virtually alone. Further, in hybrid model emphasizes the leader's emotional intelligence in noticing in time the risks of burnout and individual isolation.

*"It has worked well for us in the team that people will actively visit the office, to avoid only working alone." (L8)*

*"What has been identified and recognized is that we need to have some face to face in-person interaction to avoid people feeling completely disconnected and isolated from everything. Occasionally, we try to gather all to the same place together." (L6)*

*"In hybrid working, a leader must be able to listen closely to the team and individuals and identify indicators of burnout, work overload, or other personal stress. In hybrid leadership, emotional intelligence is critical." (L1)*

## **4.2 Hybrid leadership success factors**

### **4.2.1 Trust**

The interview data revealed recommended practices for developing and maintaining trust in a hybrid work model, such as open and honest communication, clear expectations and accountability, and opportunities for team building and social engagement. Overall, the interview data reveal that trust is the most critical factor to a successful hybrid model.

Creating a culture of trust fosters a sense of shared responsibility and ownership among employees by establishing clear expectations and providing opportunities for growth and development. Successful hybrid leadership needs to create and maintain trust. Trust is more difficult to create in virtual moments where team members cannot see in person. Building trust requires a hybrid work with its additional contribution. In hybrid

leadership, there needs to be more trust in people's work since a leader cannot see what people are doing. Working at the office allows a leader to see what people are doing and when they are present. Additionally, for a leader it is vital to know the team members and their skills and limitations. This also enables sharing trust and responsibility among the employees and delegating tasks. Hence, one of the most critical factors is trust.

*“A hybrid work environment has assisted leaders in allowing letting to go some things and trust people more; it has been recognized that individuals can and are pleased to accomplish things, and most people actually want to contribute to things. In some ways, a comparable climate of trust has grown, although maintaining well-being may have become more challenging.” (L4)*

*“I would describe a successful hybrid team and its leadership that everything is based on trust and knowing people, as well as trusting the individual's ability to assess how they organize their work and how and when they want to do their work.” (L3)*

*“A leader should have sufficient trust in their adult subordinates to recognize the strengths and weaknesses and then delegate work accordingly. This implies that if there are common duties to be completed, the leader can delegate those responsibilities to certain persons who are more skilled or experienced in a particular field, while delegating another duty in another area to someone else.” (E4)*

Trust plays a crucial role in enabling the flexibility to choose where work is performed without constant monitoring or micromanagement. Trust allows team members to operate without feeling the pressure of being watched and distrusted. However, for this to work effectively, it is essential that everyone is fully committed to their responsibilities and that goals are clearly defined and communicated. A shared understanding of what needs to be achieved and avoiding the temptation to deviate from the task at hand is key to success. Thus, trust among team members is predominant for the success of a hybrid work model. Further, in addition, to trust, this highlights appreciation and knowledge of the team for a leader, which are also essential components in successful hybrid leadership. Knowing what the team members are doing

and holding enough meetings to keep up to date are vital to understanding team performance.

*“It is crucial to create an environment where everyone may perform their individual tasks. Like, like steering a large boat where each person is responsible for their own oar. The team leader's responsibility is to facilitate it and provide guidance on how to perform. It fosters an atmosphere where everyone can be trusted to perform their part. You can put your trust in the team and concentrate on your own work. The team understands that when they focus on their individual tasks while rowing their own oar in that common large boat, they do not need to think about anything else.” (L6)*

*“If a leader shows an excessive level of interest in the work being done by team members, whether virtually or in the office, monitoring through tools and systems, it may create an uncomfortable or unpleasant experience for the team members. In this context, the importance of trust becomes evident, as it is necessary to trust that the team are focused on the essential tasks during working hours.” (L7)*

#### **4.2.2 Environment**

When evaluating the hybrid work environment, one-third of the interviewees raised the issue of psychological safety. Psychological safety, in this sense, refers to an environment in which it is safe for individuals to be themselves and take social risks. Being psychologically safe in a work community helps the team be more cooperative, innovative, and efficient, furthering the organization. Being a psychological safe work environment unleashes employees' potential and provides potential for learning. In a psychological safe work environment, leader's role is also emphasized to contribute to a fearless work environment. Creating an open and transparent atmosphere is a crucial success factor for teams working in a hybrid model. This environment allows employees and leaders to brainstorm, communicate, and discuss emerging issues openly, including the workload situation. Especially when employees try to solve problems virtually alone, it can be quite a burden, so that kind of openness about workload situations is important. By doing so, team members can avoid attempting to tackle work overload independently and dare delegate tasks to others.

*“In hybrid model requires to be trusting and open work environment where no one need to pretend to be something they are not.” (L2)*

*“Success in hybrid model requires that individuals feel comfortable sharing their worries, sorrows, opinions, and other feelings.” (L6)*

#### **4.2.3 Communication**

Across multiple interviews, participants consistently emphasized the importance of communication and of a leader’s use of distinct communication channels for various purposes. In a hybrid work model, written communication takes on a prominent role, and it is essential to ensure that communication channels include in-person and virtual team members. Various issues might occur in hybrid work, such as ineffective communication or messages that lead to misconceptions. These are the essential things that a leader must keep in mind constantly. All the interviewees agreed that communication in a hybrid work environment demands more attention. Communication necessitates the organization or leadership create and support forums for meaningful discussion.

Furthermore, communication becomes an important element, and extra care must be taken to ensure that everyone receives the relevant information. It is crucial to engage in activities and show consideration for all team members to ensure that relevant information is accessible. Building new channels in a hybrid context may be necessary – there are more efficient approaches than overloaded email. Therefore, it is critical to consider different communication channels for different concerns, ensuring that everything obtains adequate attention from the team. As the prevalence of hybrid work increases, to exploring new ways to foster effective communication among team members is necessary. In the absence of physical office spaces, alternate channels such as Slack, recorded video training, and other similar tools can be leveraged to disseminate information efficiently and ensure all team members stay informed.

*“Leadership plays a more critical role when working virtually when there is not the same interaction relationship with other team members. The leader is more responsible for ensuring the communication still works.” (E3)*

*“A challenge in hybrid work, especially, can be communication, where some are informed while others are left out.” (E4)*

*“I would say that, in a hybrid work environment where team members are not working together in the same physical location, communication becomes even more critical. Leaders must ensure that important information is communicated effectively to the entire team, rather than solely relying on those present in the office. This is necessary to avoid team members who are working remotely from feeling excluded or as though they are missing out on important information.” (L7)*

*“The most important thing is to ensure that the leaders have all the information and can pull all the strings. [...] A leader's role becomes even more important in a hybrid work environment because they must keep up with the latest events and understand what works best for the team in a hybrid setting. To achieve this, we have implemented in our team various tools such as Teams Chat to maintain a sense of fellowship even when we are not physically present for face-to-face interaction as frequently.” (L8)*

The interviews revealed that reduced physical contact within the office could result in a lack of communication and a diminished sense of togetherness. At the start of the pandemic, as remote work became more prevalent, the importance of community took a regress. With fewer in-person meetings, communicating became more challenging. Instead of being able to express something verbally in the office quickly, employees had to take the time to write it down, which could slow down communication. This lack of accessible communication can create a feeling of disconnect, particularly when compared to the pre-pandemic era. However, in the post-pandemic hybrid model, with some in-person office interactions, there is a sense that the community is returning to its former level. Thus, in-person interactions provide opportunities to connect and communicate more efficiently, improving overall work satisfaction and productivity.

Hence, leaders are critical in maintaining communication and creating casual discussions. The interviewees also emphasized the importance of open casual communication within the team and the new communicating methods that emerged

from these discussions. Due the hybrid model, leaders must explore a new way of communicating and keep the team informed. Nevertheless, it also maintains communication between the team members. As in the hybrid work environment, face-to-face interaction may be less frequent and casual hallway conversation might be more challenging to implement. Additionally, interviewees highlight that casual hallways conversation in the office can be very productive, so it is crucial to maintain these types of conversations in a hybrid work environment. A leader can support casual conversations on the dedicated discussion platform to support the team's discussion.

*“The most concrete effect that hybrid model has changed things is that we had to explore new ways to communicate and foster a sense of community and teamwork.” (L3)*

*“For example, I have set up a team chat, where all can chat free-form discussion not necessarily related to work matters. Anyone can contribute to the chat, and I try to start conversations and encourage others to join in by chatting in a casual and informal manner, like how we might chat if we ran into each other in the office hallway.” (L8)*

Hybrid work has increased the multifaceted possibilities of working, and the numerous tools support doing the work and participating in it equally regardless of the physical location. All the interviewees underline that, in hybrid work, different tools have become important. For example, a tool like a Mural is a digital whiteboard. The digital whiteboard has equalized the sharing of information in the meetings. There is no need to scribble on the computer screen what is written on the whiteboard in the meeting room. Hence, these digital whiteboards have helped involve everyone virtually or on-site, regardless of location. Additionally, questionnaire tools have also become an essential part of the dialogue. The questionnaire tools arise a possibility for people to involve in the discussion in the meeting, despite the geographical and physical location.

*“With the CEO we have virtually visited several meetings. Some have been hybrid, with employees attending meetings in Canada while I was in Finland and our CEO in the United States. Despite this, we have all been sitting around the same "table" using the Mural to organize our thoughts. This is only one example, but it is appropriate for individuals who like talk spontaneously. On*

*the contrary, questionnaire tools are suitable for those who prefer to consider and think. These tools are also used to bring out and share different thoughts. The hybrid work environment has brought up such an awareness to the fact that what kind of tools serve equally everyone regardless of whether you are in the office or virtually.” (L4)*

Further, a leader should be empathic and actively communicate with team members because it might be challenging to grasp someone's true situation if a leader rarely sees or hears from the team face-to-face. This highlights the importance of being easily accessible for the team members, enabling an easy information flow and the possibility of the need for help. Five interviewees revealed that in the hybrid model, the difficulty for a leader is that leader is readily available. It is much simpler to ask a question while being nearby at the office and glance up rather than being virtually and starting a Teams chat. Hence, this also supports that, occasionally, meeting face-to-face at the office within the team is beneficial to enable more accessible communication and cooperation in the projects. On the other hand, if a leader cannot visit the team often, for example, due to different geographical locations, one interviewee highlighted the possibility of utilizing a leader network from within the organization near the team members to assist when needed.

*“Virtually, the leader is easily more absent and busier. The leader must pay special attention to being present and accessible.” (E1)*

*“At its best, in a hybrid model, the leader is like “a safe harbor” that can be expected to be accessible to the employee in good times and bad.” (E5)*

*“In particular, during the pandemic, I led a team in Denmark even though I could not be physically present. I was able to turn it into a hybrid model, though. I had a good colleague in Denmark with whom I had previously worked, and I used them to make sure I was informed of everything that was occurring there. Worked with the team as a co-leader and shared space with customers, so I could count on to get updates on developments in Denmark. For instance, how the meeting went, how the client felt, the team's effectiveness, etc. As a result, I could have frank conversations about topics like whether the client was satisfied or whether we were concentrating on the right or incorrect things with the trustworthy person on the other end.” (L6)*

Maintaining influence and effective communication with the team is possible when working hybrid, but leaders need to find different ways to achieve this. For example, it is important to recognize that team meetings should not always focus on business-related discussions. Utilizing meeting time for casual conversation, including personal matters, can foster a sense of fellowship within the team. It is important to note that these discussions may not occur as naturally in a hybrid environment as in an office setting where team members share physical space. Therefore, it may be necessary to organize meetings specifically for casual conversation and check-ins when working virtually in a hybrid model. Additionally, arranging one-on-one meetings at regular intervals is recommendable to keep in touch with team members and allow time for communication.

*“In order to promote teamwork and getting to know the team, as a leader I have increased communication, team meetings and 1:1 discussion. In addition, I have tried to give time to just such casual conversation that we do not necessarily get straight to the point in the meetings. Then I have also reserved time from the calendars for our team, such as common coffee moments or lunches, where we can share information and feelings about things outside of work as well.” (L3)*

*“For example, in the management team, we start each management team meeting, e.g., every week, with everyone telling one positive thing about their own life and business from the previous week. Even though it feels often that the time for meeting is tight, we do have few minutes for everyone to share their feelings. Through the weekly short conversations, we have got to know each other more specifically. In it, you get to know the lives of the other team members little by little. What would be important is to be able to talk about something other than only rushing to work.” (L4)*

#### **4.2.4 Social and cultural skills**

Through the interviews, the importance of organizational culture in social interaction emerged from different interviewees. The hybrid model performs best in an informal and relaxed atmosphere regardless of the industry. The possibility to discuss things directly and openly, like human to human, enables one to get to know with others easier. However, creating a sense of community can be challenging in a hybrid work environment. Repeated interactions, time, and face-to-face meetings are vital for

creating social and personal relationships. Since these interactions occur slowly in the virtual world, one interviewee highlighted this organization's responsibility to create forums where a sense of fellowship can develop. It is fundamental to organize various events, team days, and other activities where individuals may connect face-to-face.

*“A significant factor in successful hybrid leadership is organizational culture. Hybrid work is unsuitable in a company that is led by strict rules and fear because hybrid leadership requires mutual trust, openness and an already good work atmosphere that you cannot build virtually.” (E2)*

*“Our business has a solid culture that is distinguished by a professional but fun attitude. When communication is open and conversations are flowing, we make jokes and tell each other stories. For instance, I continue to participate in the talks in the old project teams’ Teams chat where we still laugh and joke about, even though it has nothing to do with my current job responsibilities. This type of culture reflects the idea that when a sense of team is created, it has an effect that goes beyond particular projects. When a strong sense of team is developed, it sustains itself.” (L6)*

Leader’s social and cultural skills were also stressed in the interviews on the point of view of listening to team members and engaging them on proactive spontaneous discussion, enabling the leader to perceive team members feelings. This requires good interaction and social skills from the leader to listen to others and perceive different actions. Instead of adopting a one-size-fits-all strategy for the entire team, a leader needs to prioritize listening to each individual and then tailoring their approach accordingly. It is crucial to acknowledge and consider individual distinctions as much as possible instead of viewing the team as a whole.

*“The position of a leader is more important in hybrid work than it is in on-site work. It is vital to become acquainted with the team and contribute to its efforts. As a result, the leader must have the correct mindset and be able to carefully listen to what is happening on, what the team needs, and what feelings the team and individuals have. It is critical to understand what the team is up to and what can be expected of them. It is also essential to adequately convey one’s own expectations.” (L1)*

People have different wishes for leadership, and it should be considered how different ways of leading suit the other person, micro-managing should be avoided. Leading a hybrid team is one of many ways to do it. The leadership needs to be adjusted to suit the team and individuals. Thus, the hybrid work model demands more the leader's social skills to demonstrate a heightened level of interest, inquiry, and investigative work to follow the team's progress effectively. A hybrid work environment allows for different work methods for employees to work according to their preferences. In these circumstances, leaders need to consider the diverse individual requirements. People in this hybrid work environment are so dissimilar that some enjoy working every day while others detest going to the office altogether. Knowing how to balance this, it is vital, as giving each team member equal attention and considering how they want to be acknowledged. Thus, leading is about recognizing different leading methods from a group of people with very diverse preferences about how they prefer to work. In particular, as team members are in different locations, it is not always possible to provide quick assistance and guidance, exchange project information or resolve any issues quickly, which makes proactive communication through different channels essential for leaders. Therefore, the leader's role is critical in providing assistance and guidance to team members. Leaders must remain actively engaged with team members through different communication channels to ensure the successful execution of tasks.

*“Individual needs should be considered while implementing hybrid leadership. More direction and mentorship should be offered if someone requires it, but if someone is very self-directed and independent and does not require much guidance or supervision, it is not essential to check in as regularly. As a result, a leader must consider each person's skills and limitations and drive the team forward as a cohesive entity.” (E4)*

*“Not all hybrid teams are suited to the same style of leadership and work practices, leadership must be tailored to each team. This emphasizes the need of team members being either assisted or self-directed in managing themselves, so individuals can detect their own possible pitfalls, such as if working remotely has been too isolating and whether coming into the office would be beneficial. It is also necessary to be able to select one's own appropriate work approaches. This cycle may be different for everyone, but it does necessitate identifying the ideal methods for oneself. That is essential for success.” (L8)*

*I have been making an effort to listen to each team member separately to learn what motivates them, what goals they have for the team's performance or the leader's job, and what they aspire to achieve. I then took appropriate action and modified my leadership style. There has been a wide range in people's aspirations, with some wanting to be more involved and others wishing to be less involved." (L3)*

Regardless of the location, leaders should be able to meet people and demonstrate a genuine interest in them. Most interviews noted that the leader's responsibility is to ensure that people have equal opportunities to participate and to be noticed. Leadership fails if people are treated unequally. Such as that, the importance of those in the office increases and those who work virtually remain secondary. Active written communication is necessary through commonly used channels to ensure that all team members, whether virtual or on-site, have access to valuable information. This approach helps prevent situations where information is only available to those in the office, resulting in virtual workers being excluded from critical updates or discussions.

*"As a leader, my objective is to ensure equitable access to information for everyone without any privileged advantage for anyone." (L7)*

*"Ultimately, in hybrid work, various tools will be used to assist leadership and the way of work. Furthermore, information exchange and sharing will be more closely linked and accessible through various channels, allowing us to pay attention to equal possibilities for people at the office and virtually." (L8)*

The interviewees highlighted the different roles of the leader in a hybrid work environment. Three types of leadership were emphasized in interviews; enabling, servantship and coaching leadership. As a leader, it is important to adopt an enabling attitude, even if it is not inherently possible. This entails taking a proactive approach in both planning and strategizing for oneself, as well as for the team members. Leaders need to think carefully that even on those days and moments when there is no easy question route open, it is worth concentrating on tasks that are all clearer and more familiar to the team. On the other hand, there are days when individuals need to genuinely concentrate on matters in more detail, engage in a new activity or approach a familiar task from a fresh perspective. These moments are best reserved for office days

when the focus can be channeled toward such endeavors. On the other hand, the leader's role highlights servanthship and sharing guidance and knowledge with others, facilitating the work. The leader's responsibility is to organize the time and create a framework for the team's functioning, such as being the one who coordinates the shared time and finds the best operating methods for that activity. Practical communication skills and a service-oriented leadership mindset are ideal for a hybrid work environment. A leader emphasizes the team's requirements and considers the changing nature of work. Nowadays, many teams operate on projects or in agile teams. A leader's responsibility has shifted attention to supporting a team's competence, skills and knowledge growth, career progression, and general well-being. A leader needs to recognize their role as a facilitator and supporting function for a team. Further, a leader must be available and easily accessible to a team. It is vital to communicate expectations. In these circumstances, a team can conveniently inform when the expectations cannot be reached. This highlights a leader's role as a coach, like co-living the moments, to find alternative approaches for accomplishing tasks.

*“Coaching leadership is suitable for a hybrid environment where team performance is encouraged and taken care of. The leader must be able to support the team in its goals.” (E1)*

*“The leader should be an enabler in the team (servant leadership), e.g., the leader does not command but listens and can bring everyone the necessary amount of transparency and information. As a leader, everything starts with understanding yourself and where you get your energy.” (E3)*

*“When I worked as a project manager, it meant that I had the best understanding of that particular field. Thus, when I was on-site, I did not actually do much actively, except to provide guidance and expertise for the team whenever needed. I drew upon my own knowledge and expertise to assist others. However, when we were remote again, the dynamic shifted to more of a two-way exchange, where I would check in on the progress of various tasks and ensure that everything was on track for upcoming meetings. It was a two-phase approach.” (L6)*

#### 4.2.5 Team cooperation

Companies worked mainly virtually during the pandemic when face-to-face social interactions were almost non-existent. These also have affected the creation of human relationships and networks. However, it is possible to use different technological channels to communicate with others, but this is not as natural as face-to-face interaction in the office. Three interview participants highlight that creating human relationships and new networks has been a clear challenge during the pandemic and working mostly virtually. Thus, for a leader, it is vital to establish and maintain relationships and networks between individuals and teams that share the same business area. This can facilitate communication beyond individual teams and prevent a sense of disconnection from a larger organizational entity. Without active efforts to promote these relationships and networks, it is easy to lose sight of the broader picture of the business.

*“In hybrid work, human relationships remain superficial as you never sit at the same table to talk about anything other than work matters.” (E1)*

*“It is naturally easier to maintain networks visiting the office. For example, when in a canteen you might see your network and have a quick catch-up instead of virtually it requires quite a lot of work to randomly message the network and possibly disturb at the wrong time.” (L7)*

In the hybrid work environment, it is also good to come together in a team at the office to take advantage of the time together with different activities and boost the team fellowship. Only some interviewees noted the idea of a common area in the office to provide the space to see colleagues if there is no agreed typical day to visit the office altogether within the team. Hence, to facilitate group and social interaction while working hybridlike, interviewees highlighted that in the work community and within the team, specific days, meetings, and events for in-person gatherings were established to provide possibilities for team cooperation.

*“When we are working in the office, we have made it a priority to agree a common area at the office where to be. This implies that even if someone is not*

*in the office on the same day as the rest of the team, other teams can still be found in the same common area of the office. As a result, we have tried to facilitate spontaneous coffee chats and other casual encounters with coworkers.” (L6)*

In hybrid work, most interviewees emphasized that their work community has arisen in discussions, and everyone also needs live connections from the office. That total virtual work may only be suitable for some. Sometimes there is a need for direct contact with people. In this, for a leader, it is possibility to evaluate how it can activate team members to visit the office.

*“For example, as a way of encouraging attendance and combatting the barrier of reluctance to leave home, for the office meetings I have procured some special treats to offer as an incentive for individuals to attend. This direct contact with people provides a refreshing change of pace and can help re-energize everyone in the team.” (L8)*

As a counterbalance to the daily work, it is also recommended to hold informal team meetings, for example, once a month, which can have a theme, such as music corner or a quiz, according to the team's preferences enabling shared time and work balance. Providing a counterbalance to hectic information-heavy daily work is essential, where leaders can create such a relaxed moment for team interaction.

*“Regular non-work-related meetings have been significant and essential for the team. The leader also has a role in this because his task is to ensure that everyone's workload is also such that, in the long term, these events are able and wanted to be prioritized.” (E5)*

*“Every alternate week, we conducted a music corner within the team, where each team member was on their turn a hostess. The team eagerly anticipated each music corner and got to know a little bit more about the personality of the hosts. I also observed that in the hybrid model, highlights the importance of casual relaxed moments that differ from the daily work.” (L7)*

*“In order to maintain and develop sociality, we have started new practices, like we have such an after lunch. It is twenty minutes once a week, where one team member in turn comes up with some activity. We have done quizzes and TikTok dances and all that kind of team spirit creating and getting to know each other.*

*For example, we have also been asked some dating advices and questions and everything that you can think of and suits the team.” (L4)*

Regarding team activities, a few interviewees recommended organizing everything so that it is possible to participate virtually and on-site. However, it is recommended to see also together within the team with such team days and activities when everyone should join the activities physically. These activities can be, for example, joint lunches or dinners organized after workdays. One interviewee also highlighted their work community’s habit arranging voluntary team activities. They have been on the porch, ice fishing together and planning a new activity. They have been keeping in touch with the team more closely and referring to the feedback that has also been liked and needed. As most of the daily connections happen through the screen, it is nice to do different things together. Whereas it has been perceived as good, they try to maintain that cycle so there are not too long gaps between the moments. Hence, this can increase the commitment and motivation to the work and to feeling part of the community and provide the possibility to get to know closer team members.

*“The hybrid model has required consideration, especially in facilitating joint events. The timing of the events and the technical solutions have been adapted so that everyone has the same opportunity to participate, and no one feels left out.” (E5)*

*“Continuously, we have our weekly after lunch meetings, which is really nice. Then occasionally, we go for dinner or organize some activities together. Additionally, we organize workshops and other things for different geographic locations, like EMEA and North America separately, to provide the possibility to gather physically together in the same place.” (L4)*

#### **4.2.6 Social Pressure**

The hybrid model allows the project execution on a broader scale while also utilizing global local knowledge and networks. The use of a hybrid model enables project teams worldwide to interact without everyone physically gathering in the same place. This allows for developing varied project teams and completing similar initiatives that would

not be possible otherwise. This hybrid model has much potential for linking people and expediting project execution. Moreover, the hybrid model enables companies to recruit a workforce on a broader scale rather than from a specific geographical location. In this, one interview highlighted how hybrid leadership has brought many opportunities, especially looking from the point of view of the recruitment industry and how many people are employed. In Finland, there is shortage of skilled workers, and hybrid work enables them to use, for example, assistants from other cities and other countries systematically. So, employees can be found now in different locations, which helps tremendously.

*“In our work, hybrid work has made it possible to utilize a broader range of knowledge capital.” (E5)*

*“We were able to complete a project on a global scale rather than limiting it to a single place and waiting six months to determine whether it should be relocated. This approach, I believe, was more efficient because we were able to draw on local networks and experience. With the hybrid model, the possibilities are limitless.” (L6)*

*“For instance, hybrid work enables the teams to be more geographically divided than previously, and you can search for talent around the world. That it is not necessary for team members to physically be present where the office is located.” (L4)*

The onboarding process can be challenging to execute virtually, and it requires careful planning to ensure that new employees learn and integrate into the team effectively. It is important to note that onboarding office days allow opportunity for the new employee to interact with others. However, if virtual work is possible in the team, it is equally essential to provide that opportunity for new employees. Hence, in the virtual context, it is vital to ensure the possibility to follow team members and brainstorm with colleagues in onboarding process to get familiar with the work task and the business. Nevertheless, the interviewees highlight that in the hybrid model, it would be most suitable for new employees to start working on-site first to get used to the working environment.

*“It has been more difficult for leaders to monitor new team members' orientation and learning progress.” (E1)*

*“When onboarding new employees, mainly virtual, it might affect efficient information sharing. In virtual work, “silent information” may remain unshared and “stupid questions” unasked.” (E2)*

*“When a new employee enters to the team, it takes a while before the work gets started naturally. Thus, we start the work at the office to get a good readiness for work, for example to get all technological matters to work. In addition to this, we immediately add the new team member to the team chats, so it is possible to cooperate and get help right from the starting point and join the team's activities and conversations.” (L2)*

*“During virtual workdays, the new employee should be able to focus on the issues or tasks, for example self-study, that have been planned for them. [...] As a leader, it is crucial to know, plan and implement steps that enable the new employee to integrate seamlessly into their new role. It can be a significant waste of time, if the leader notices after three months that the new employee has been unable to learn the new role. [...] Therefore, ensuring a high-quality orientation and opportunities for success is critical.” (L7)*

*“We have had a lot of new employees recently, and working in a hybrid model, they have been able to look at people's calendars quite easily, and approach others through Teams asking if they could come and watch the meeting or interview etc., that we they have been able to follow other people's work across team boundaries, get to know others.” (L3)*

Social interaction is also highlighted when a new leader enters the team. It also emphasizes that it in the beginning, there would be as many face-to-face encounters and work together as possible to become familiar with the team and its working methods. On the other hand, social interactions within the team are beneficial if the team has good cohesion, which makes it easy for the new leader to enter an open working environment. This also helps in a situation where the leader cannot meet everyone face-to-face in the beginning.

*“For instance, with a new team, leadership in hybrid model can be effective, when you start with a more intense presence in the first few weeks and go from there to a hybrid model to a greater extent/increase the share of virtuality.” (L6)*

*When I started as a new leader in the team it required first review of the team operations and cohesion to get to in. However, to join as a new leader to team was quite smooth because of the welcoming and collaborative team.” (L2)*

#### **4.2.7 Guidance**

To provide a safe hybrid work environment, the interviewees highlighted the importance of regular meetings to discuss current issues and feelings, both on a team and individual level. This way also enables leaders to detect possible issues and try to solve the situations even though face-to-face interactions are not so often. Hence, leaders can stay up-to-date and positively influence to everyone's well-being in the work environment.

*“The team is encouraged to communicate openly and honestly about workload, and employees are urged to offer help to those with a heavier workload. The team meets every week to review the previous week's workload and discuss upcoming tasks. To indicate their workload status, the team employs traffic light signals, such as red, yellow, and green.” (L5)*

Regular surveying and status updates integrated into team meetings facilitate progress tracking, performance evaluation, and ensuring everyone is well-informed and aligned with shared goals. Additionally, it allows an opportunity for team members to offer assistance and support to colleagues who may require it. This collaborative approach strengthens team dynamics and contributes to a positive and productive work environment.

*“Regular meetings are recommended to maintain the status of the team's development. Every morning, we have a daily fifteen-minute stand-up meeting. The daily stand-up is a task allocation meeting in which we discuss the day's work and resolve any issues that may arise. In addition, on Fridays (thirty minutes), we evaluate the list of difficulties, new developments, absences, and scheduling adjustments. Every three weeks, we also have one-on-one meetings and also larger team and departmental meetings. All of these practices promote unity and ensure that everyone is aware of what is going on in the team.” (L1)*

*“We use a weekly anonymous questionnaire for employees to provide updates on their workload and share their feelings. The results of the survey are published on the team's Slack forum, allowing everyone to comment and discuss*

*the outcomes. While the publication of results is optional, the individual may indicate that only leaders can view their responses.” (L4)*

Giving recognition is also important in motivating in the sense of caring team members. Six interviewees pointed out that in their companies, they are encouraged to share accomplishments and give feedback. However, sharing team accomplishments and giving feedback can be more challenging in the hybrid work environment. The spontaneous feedback you might hear in the office has decreased and giving feedback has become more planned and structured. In this way, a leader, must remember the importance of giving feedback. Hence, this requires a leader to make more effort to highlight individual and team successes and provide opportunities to learn from others. This also motivates the individuals to enjoy team success and strive for success.

*“Our work community and team encourage continuous feedback. We usually have a short reflection call to see how it went after the bigger client meetings.” (E3)*

*“Successes should be celebrated, and the team should be encouraged to highlight even small achievements. Especially in the virtual world, we may focus too much on the performance itself, in which case we must remember completely that there is also a person working on the other side.” (E5)*

*“One challenge that I have acknowledge, is sharing the success while working in hybrid model. When you do not work next to each other in the office, learning from others and experience others’ success is more demanding. This has been highlighted also among team members’ conversations that in the hybrid model they do not hear so much about others’ different ways of doing things and learn through these. Hence, I see that as a leader I need to make conscious effort for sharing the successes and get the team unified.” (L7)*

*“We have an ongoing practice of providing feedback in both ways, and it is critical for this to operate properly so that the atmosphere is open and honest. I have considered it essential to recognize achievements in hybrid, like compliments for a good presentation for the client, for instance. While it is easy to express appreciation in person, say after meeting, face-to-face, it requires an extra step to send a message via Teams chat when working remotely. Accordingly, it is essential to keep in mind to provide feedback and make timer for it.” (L6)*

To prevent misconceptions and the exaggeration of feedback's meaning, it is crucial for those who work in a hybrid context to also pay attention to the way and tone of their feedback and its relevance. It is essential to remember that leaders should provide feedback in all circumstances, even unfavorable ones because the same standards apply.

*“There is nothing more frightening than constantly having to wonder what will happen when the boss starts a chat. Hence, the hybrid environment demands from a leader also to learn to provide feedback better. That you should not write what comes to mind. Employers should not be subjected to that kind of harassment.” (L6)*

The interview data of hybrid model also stand out that it is essential for individuals to have wider career opportunities and freedom to work regardless of location and time. In this, individuals have a possibility for self-development from a broader perspective. Career opportunities are easy to look at from different cities and even countries without a need to think about having to commute long distances for work. Hence, the hybrid model also provides flexibility for the work-life balance. The flexibility to combine work and free time motivates people and increases well-being. Thus, a hybrid work environment creates flexibility and ease in everyday life in a completely different way. However, in hybrid work, a leader is also essential to notice possibilities inside the office for career development for individuals. As individuals have accessible possibilities to seek career possibilities, it is recommended that leaders strive to enable career development at work within the team and organization to motivate employees instead of looking for additional or new challenges elsewhere.

*“Hybrid work and, thus, hybrid leadership can increase well-being because it becomes easier to coordinate work-life balance.” (E2)*

*“Hybrid work also enables career development - for example, I have the possibility to lead our operations and team, even though I live in a different city. Additionally, hybrid model provides to combine work and free time flexible.” (L3)*

*“It is pivotal to be able to motivate the team, that people feel committed to the work. Otherwise, the dissatisfaction can trigger job changes.” (L6)*

According to self-development, two interviewees noted the importance of learning and training for team members and leaders. Learning and training include trying out concepts, copied from colleagues, or discovered through personal experience, to see how they apply in real-world scenarios. On the other hand, learning includes self-reflecting, a process of understanding own identity and place in the work community. As that leader does not learn through trying and failing; instead, the leader can also improve learning by reflecting on itself and the entity and brainstorming with colleagues. This also highlights the self-management importance. That the leader needs to handle self-management before it is possible to lead others efficiently. It is vital to reflect on leadership and how it suits the team and modify it to individuals' preferences. Moreover, companies must invest in leadership and provide leaders with different training possibilities, such as online courses and workshops, to perceive leadership outside of the box, which can continually improve leadership performance and contribute to the overall success of the work environment.

*“In our company, for leaders is provided various training educational opportunities are made available to. These trainings are highly recommended and have proven to be useful. It is also essential for leaders to be self-reflective and strive to improve their own performance and the work environment.” (L1)*

#### **4.2.8 Planning and scheduling**

Leadership in a hybrid work environment requires organizing and planning among scheduling tasks and meetings. Hence, hybrid leadership has improved work scheduling and project management. Leaders have more control over the process, allowing team members to have more scheduled workdays, avoiding working around the clock for a few days and then being unsure what to do next at the end of the week. Additionally, hybrid leadership of teams necessitates planning and scheduling of shared time. A leader needs to be more intentional about creating shared moments and considering

them, as previously it would happen spontaneously in the office. A hybrid model has also required the adoption of new working methods, where team meetings no longer necessarily mean everyone in a conference room, as someone may be out for a walk or even in a different time zone abroad. For a leader, this means changing to address mentioned matters by carefully weighing the ideal time and forum for particular topics and the possibility of involving everyone equally in the meeting agenda.

*“It is necessary to allocate time differently to discuss and handle the conditions for implementing employees' work. A leader must also be able to prioritize their calendar so that there is enough space for everything. In addition, it is necessary to clearly indicate which topics and tasks to focus on at any given time, that is, to prioritize the work of employees as well. In addition, the leader must ensure that employees can work in peace without constant interruptions.” (E1)*

*“As a hybrid leader, careful planning and consideration are critical in determining which tasks are to be completed on-site during the one half of the week, allowing the leader to act as an advisor for the team, while other tasks are addressed during the second half of the week. [...] I have tried to maintain the sense that the work is well-structured and planned.” (L6)*

*“In hybrid work, planning in advance is crucial. For example, the meeting agenda has been shared in advance for participants. In practice, during a hybrid meeting, there should be a chairperson and a technical producer. The technical producer can be anyone from the team who ensures that the camera, microphones, and other equipment are set up correctly before the meeting begins. Additionally, there should be two screens, with one prioritizing the remote participants' faces or videos, and the other displaying the meeting content, which can be shared using digital whiteboards and other tools. Brainstorming sessions should not rely on activating in-person participants writing to the office board as not everyone may have access to them. It requires careful preparation, tools, and consideration to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to participate and voice their opinions.” (L4)*

### 4.3 Drivers between the team and leadership interaction

#### 4.3.1 Motivation

The interviews showed how vital trust in an employee can significantly impact an individual's work motivation. Through trust, responsibility is shared with the individual in hybrid work, and self-management is emphasized in planning and doing the work. This was also highlighted in the interviews as a work motivator for the employees, that there are flexible work opportunities and that employees can influence their workday. Hence, trust can foster work motivation and a sense of employee appreciation. In a hybrid work environment, leaders should focus on motivating employees and fostering a culture where employees can make their own decisions and take actions that drive them. Additionally, it is essential that employees value their work and that the work is meaningful. This highlights, the possibility of a new challenge, problem-solve, creating and learning something new. As a result, leaders need to foster an environment that inspires and motivates employees.

*“By demonstrating trust in my team members and holding them accountable to high standards, I have observed that their motivation and commitment to our organization has increased. [...] One of the central themes of my leadership philosophy is the idea that freedom and responsibility are interconnected. In my experience, when there is trust and confidentiality in a working relationship, I feel comfortable granting more autonomy to team members. This alleviates my concerns about monitoring their performance and enables me to focus on other aspects of my role.” (L7)*

*“My team is motivated of their work. They care of their work and my employees enjoys serving clients and finds the work purposeful.” (L2)*

On the other hand, a lack of trust can have critical consequences for an individual's work motivation. This affects trust between the leader and the employees on both sides. A leader should align consistent and on-target goals to provide good opportunities for the team to succeed and be motivated by work. Additionally, all team members need to treat equally and have possible to attend and be informed well. This highlights the

importance of providing feedback and acknowledgment. Essential is to trust employees and avoid micro-management.

*“One of the worst things that can happen is a lack of trust. If you, as a leader, regularly monitor your employees' work, such as when there is a system in place to track everyone's hours worked. If you keep track, every minute is recorded. At worst, a lack of trust means that the work is not completed on time. Employees become unmotivated and lose their drive when they do not know what is expected of them and do not receive timely feedback.” (L1)*

#### **4.3.2 Comfort**

The interviews underlined the comfort of a work environment. The comfort of the work environment emphasizes the leadership importance of providing an environment where it is possible to participate and influence. To provide a comfortable environment includes awareness of needed tasks and providing sufficient work conditions and tools to ensure efficient work and project execution. It also includes the flexibility for individuals to adjust their work schedules and location according to their personnel needs. Besides, to ensure comfort in daily work, providing all the same access to information, tools and technology is essential. Encouraging to healthy work-life balance is also vital to employees feeling comfortable with the work environment. On the contrary, failure to ensure a comfortable work environment can be reflected in the team's well-being. The circumstance that someone feels isolated as an outsider from the team. Overall, an uncomfortable work environment can be evident in the team as sick absences, a general lack of well-being at work, a lack of motivation and team fragmentation.

*“I see that a leader fails in hybrid leadership when people feel that they are completely distanced from the work community, the team, the project and everything. Though, the team is aware of their daily tasks and executes them during the day and then at some point goes to sleep. But this is wrong. The fact is that the team is detached from everything. [...] The leader needs to be connected to people and know what is going on.” (L6)*

### 4.3.3 Innovation

Across multiple interviews, participants emphasized the importance of an innovative approach to leading in a hybrid work environment. They underlined the value of trying, adapting, and implementing fresh and innovative ways of working to take advantage of the benefits of hybrid work, such as more flexibility and virtual cooperation. It is vital to involve the team and experiment with team ideas openly. A welcoming and open environment is crucial for the hybrid model. Nothing will happen if there is an environment of dread and uncertainty. Further, a safe environment provides an opportunity to consider and evaluate new work and operation methods. In order to succeed, responsibility needs to be shared, like the leader is not alone responsible for the team; the team also builds the team's success.

*“To reimagine the way of work, hybrid work requires innovative approach to rethink the way of work. Hybrid leaders must be imaginative and open-minded. Not only becoming trapped in old habits or being overly tied to certain old ways, but daring to test oneself and try new ways to see what works and what does not. You miss out on a lot if you never try anything new.” (L3)*

*“Open-mindedness and readiness to test new methods and alternatives are essential factors in successful hybrid leadership. It entails investigating what is conceivable while also entrusting the team with the task of coming up with fresh ideas. It is critical to encourage the team to think creatively and submit their own ideas.” (L4)*

### 4.3.4 Self-management

Most interviewees brought up that that hybrid work increases the pressure on self-management for individuals. In a hybrid work model, self-management performance is significantly emphasized as it requires independent decisions when working virtually from home, for example. This highlights the leader's responsibility to facilitate individuals to recognize their optimal work environment, schedule, and habits, to ensure they perform at their best. The flexibility offered by a hybrid model allows individuals to adapt their work to their specific needs and preferences. However, virtual work can

present challenges, such as working at high speed without taking breaks, leading to burnout. Therefore, it is vital to prioritize taking breaks and self-care and knowing when to stop working. Recognizing and leveraging one's skills and abilities in any work environment is critical to achieving success in one's role.

*“Self-management’s role highlights in hybrid virtual model instead of working onsite” (L2)*

*“I would instruct all leaders for discussing the self-management topic with their team members and guiding the discussion toward team members reflecting on and learning from their own actions.” (L3)*

*“It is beneficial for everyone to have the freedom to choose how they want to work, as each individual in the team is different and has unique preferences regarding work styles. What may work for one person may not necessarily work for another. In both ways, working from the office and virtually has its own benefits. Like, in remote days can be more focused and work more efficiently. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that also on remote days the work is well organized with breaks and there is balance between work and free time. Hence, this highlights also the self-management to keep the balance.” (L8)*

On the contrary, the hybrid model also requires a leader’s self-management skills to provide efficient working arrangements for the team. Two respondents pointed out that the leader must reflect on their actions and impact on the team. Managing themselves increases the ability to stay focused, which also helps to form the desired actions for the team as lead by example. A leader’s good self-management skills also reflect the ability to lead and inspire others, which can be reflected in the team as reliability and appreciation.

*“The function of a leader in hybrid leadership is more important than that of a remote or in-person leader alone. This also underlines the importance of the leader’s self-management. Before being able to lead a team, one must first have the correct mentality and be able to lead oneself.” (L1)*

#### **4.3.5 Strategy and vision**

The strategy directs the organization by setting defined goals and monitoring progress. Conversely, the vision is a picture of the future that drives people to carry out the company's plan. A motivating vision guides initiatives in the desired direction. Thus, three interviewees highlighted the importance of understanding the strategy and vision as the company provides direction through indicative goals that align with the strategy and vision, which are customized for each team. Hence, the team member can align their work in the desired way. Additionally, this can be evaluated in the team meetings, for example, check-in real-time for challenges, action points, and progress updates. Regular meetings also allow a leader to see the status of tasks or projects, how people and teams are performing and what actions are needed to promote activities in line with the direction of goals. Moreover, a motivating vision may act as a guidepost for decision-making, enabling people to take ownership of their work and adapt to changes in the hybrid workplace. A well-communicated vision also helps create a feeling of purpose and direction, encouraging people to work toward common goals.

*“Knowing the strategy, goals, and overall vision are critical and necessitates frequent evaluation. This enables us to determine the target and the actions that must be taken.” (L1)*

#### **4.4 Key findings and extended model**

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the companies' operations to be almost entirely virtual, and as a result, companies have gradually changed their operations to a hybrid model in this post-pandemic context. Hence the study explored the hybrid model and leadership in a hybrid virtual environment. Therefore, the key findings from the data can be seen in below Table 5. The Table 5 presents guidelines, based on the interview data findings, for leaders to consider in hybrid leadership, which assists in leading effectively in the hybrid working environment. The leadership guidelines are divided into seven groups organizational culture, safe environment, open communication, providing guidance,

continuous cooperation, innovativeness, and consideration. Each group is also opened in more detail to different actions to be made.

**Table 4.** Summary of leading in hybrid virtual environment.

<b>Organizational culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define and communicate goals</li> <li>• Share responsibility and ownership</li> <li>• Visualize expectations</li> <li>• Maintain trust and appreciation</li> </ul>
<b>Safe environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an environment where everyone may perform their individual tasks</li> <li>• Enable safe and fearless environment to operate</li> </ul>
<b>Open communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain diverse communication possibilities</li> <li>• Utilize distinct communication channels</li> <li>• Ensure that all team members have access to the information</li> <li>• Strive to open communication as human to human</li> <li>• Maintain and create casual information communication between individuals and the team</li> </ul>
<b>Providing guidance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate and provide guidance on how to perform</li> <li>• Listen and learn to understand the difference between individuals</li> <li>• Provide check-in meetings</li> <li>• Give feedback</li> <li>• Guide in the career and create development possibilities</li> </ul>
<b>Continuous cooperation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize shared time within the team</li> <li>• Enable casual, informal meetings for the team</li> <li>• Highlight face-to-face interaction in the office</li> <li>• Organize team activities</li> </ul>
<b>Innovativeness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be open to new ideas</li> <li>• Try, adapt, and implement new ways of work</li> <li>• Involve the team in innovation</li> <li>• Encourage to development and innovation</li> </ul>
<b>Consideration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be easily accessible and care about team members</li> <li>• Listen to others and be empathic</li> <li>• Tailor leadership approach to suit each meaningful way for individual and the team</li> <li>• Provide equal opportunities to participate and to be noticed</li> <li>• Recognize different feelings and care about the well-being</li> </ul>

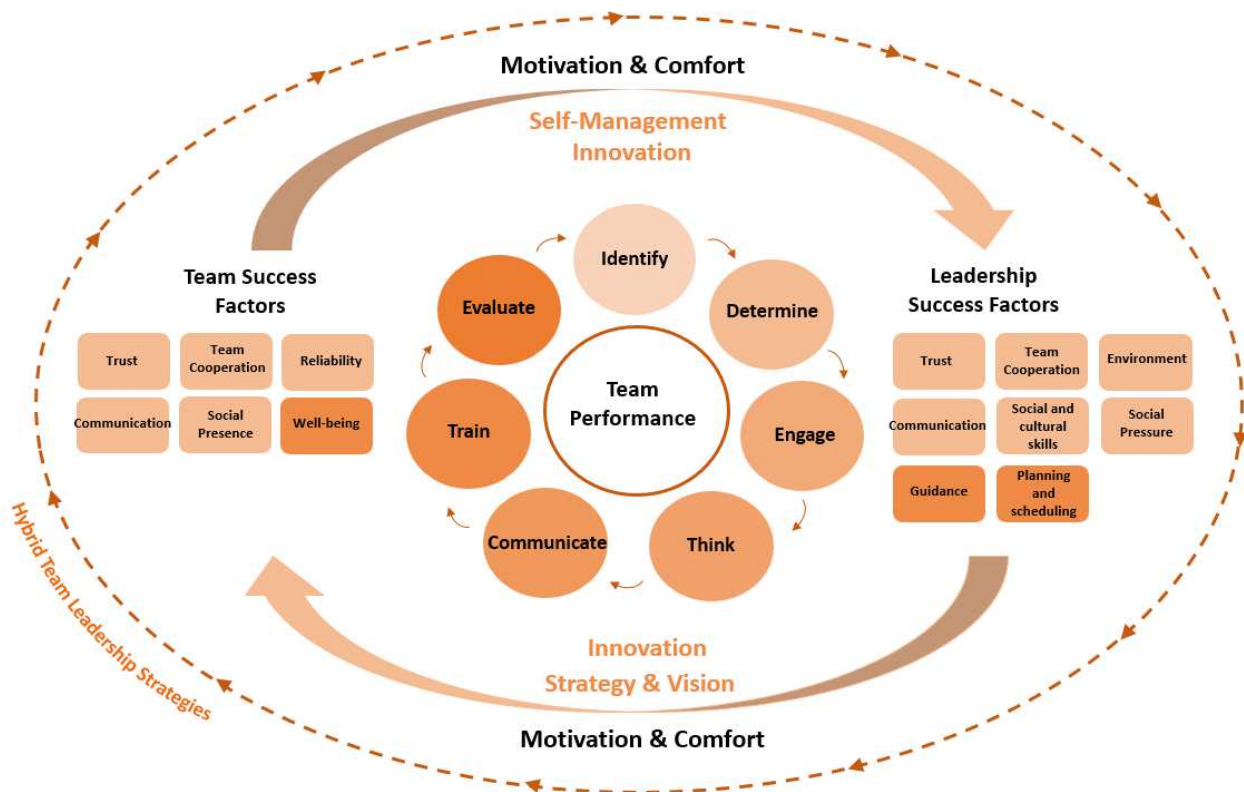
The study presented a dynamic hybrid model that combines on-site and virtual work. The research revealed that the hybrid model should be adapted to the workplace concerning in the hybrid model the team's way of doing it and thus agree with the team's common operating methods. Here it is emphasized that the model must work agilely, and employees must participate. The model also requires constant review where the leader and the team must be ready to experiment and change operating methods. Here, the change based on experience and the change in working arrangements are emphasized.

The hybrid model emphasizes the skills of virtual working and its challenges. Technology, the proper functioning of the tools, and the possibility to participate virtually in the team's operations and activities. In the hybrid model, trust, self-management, and communication are prominently displayed. These were highlighted in the research results in the data of each interviewer. Trust in the employee and leader are at the center to enable hybrid work. Trust also stresses flexibility and confidence that the work will be done. Trust is also underlined in shared responsibility. In hybrid working environment highlights that a leader should share responsibility for the team and individuals. However, to take responsibility, employees need good self-managements skills. Moreover, a leader's responsibility for self-management is pivotal when leading in a hybrid work environment and sharing responsibility for a team.

Communication is emphasized because the employee can work in a unity, even if working mainly virtually. In a hybrid working environment, working in an office supports communication and team cohesion. From the interviews, it emerged how it would be desirable to encourage the team to meet regularly at the office, in which it is also possible to guarantee a sense of community, spontaneous information sharing, spar more easily with colleagues, and overall well-being. Different leadership facilitation skills are also emphasized here in order to be able to support the employee's work both virtually and in the office. Hybrid work emphasizes the leader's facilitation skills, and equal opportunities are enabled virtually and in the office.

The key to the hybrid model is a common culture and communicated and defined goals. This also leads to shared responsibility and individual ownership. The flexible working environment promotes individuals' motivation to work. Additionally, highlights the importance of trusting employees and their self-management and choices. Among trust, the hybrid model also emphasizes the crucial of effective communication. Effective communication underlines the importance of utilizing multiple communication platforms and also observing workers virtually to avoid communication gaps. Further, utilizing different tools promotes hybrid work, and it is essential to clarify every tool's purpose to ensure adequate working arrangements. Additionally, leaders should appropriately be present, ask for feedback, support with roadblocks, and be interested in the well-being and feelings of individuals and whole team. Vital is to keep an eye on team ties and cooperation and search for ways to develop professional relationships and team cohesion. Moreover, creating purposefully shared time for cooperation for the team is recommended.

The theoretical framework for this study in Figure 6 was presented earlier in the literature review. The theoretical framework provided the basis for researching hybrid leadership and hybrid teams. Further, Figure 9 below illustrates an extended model, synthesizing the theory and empirical findings. The extended model presents a hybrid model that is more dynamic and multidimensional than what was introduced in the theoretical framework. The research showed that the hybrid model includes many features of virtual leadership and virtual teams and emphasizes the success factors of virtual leadership and virtual teams.



**Figure 9.** Extended model - the synthesis of theory and empirical findings.

The extended model supplements team success factors by adding well-being to the previous five success factors, trust, team cooperation, reliability, communication, and social presence. In particular, the hybrid team's well-being is enhanced because the hybrid model underlines the importance of focusing on the individuals and avoiding isolation from the group. Hence, in a hybrid work environment focusing on well-being is crucial. When employees have an efficient work-life balance, and the leader supports them, it promotes employee engagement and collaboration, work satisfaction and innovation. Therefore, additional attention should also be paid to the well-being of the hybrid team's success factors.

Furthermore, the extended model through the research highlights the leadership success factors in the hybrid model presented earlier in the theoretical framework by adding two success factors, guidance, and planning and scheduling to the hybrid model.

Focusing also on leadership to these two aspects, guidance, planning and scheduling, allows for greater adaptability and flexibility. The greater adaptability and flexibility also boost resource allocation more efficiently and enhance achieving desired outcomes aligned with the goals. Hence, particular attention should also be paid to guidance, and planning and scheduling to bring out the hybrid team performance as well as possible.

Moreover, in addition to the success factors of team and leadership, through research, the hybrid model has also been supplemented by the interaction drivers of team and leadership to make the hybrid model more efficient and dynamic. The theoretical framework in Figure 6 is presented motivation and comfort as the interaction drivers between the hybrid team and leadership. However, this study revealed the interaction between the hybrid team and leadership includes additional dimensions. In addition to the motivation and comfort presented in the theoretical framework, self-management skills, innovation, and strategy and vision are emphasized in the extended model. As in a hybrid virtual working environment, individuals have more responsibility and autonomy in work arrangements. Hence, self-management skills ensure smooth interactions and collaboration. As well, innovation is highlighted as an interaction driver encouraging an environment to develop and improve new ideas and solutions to enable the hybrid model to work agilely. Besides, the strategy & vision aligns the interaction between the hybrid team and leadership to ensure everyone works towards a common purpose. The shared understanding and direction are vital to make the hybrid model interaction between team and leadership work. All in all, these drivers contribute to efficient decision-making, adaptability, and overall success. Fostering these drivers in the hybrid model can promote the success factors of hybrid teams and leadership.

## 5 Summary and discussion

### 5.1 Summary

This thesis examines the hybrid model through hybrid leadership and team performance in a post-pandemic era. To my knowledge, no direct study has examined this aspect of the hybrid model after the pandemic at a practical level. Thus, this thesis contributes to the previous literature by examining a new aspect of hybrid leadership and by researching the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on leadership, which is still even three years after the start of the pandemic, a hot topic in the literature. As presented in the literature review, the key issue of this study is how to lead in the post-pandemic hybrid virtual environment. The literature review introduced team and leadership success factors from a virtual and hybrid point of view. To examine a post-pandemic hybrid model, this study is guided by the research question: *How to lead and perform in a hybrid work environment?*

To address the research question, the sub-questions are stated as follows:

- 1: *What are the success factors for the hybrid model?*
- 2: *How to facilitate the hybrid team?*

The study develops an understanding of the hybrid model through semi-structured interviews of leaders and experts working in hybrid virtual working environments. The interviews enable a comprehensive understanding of the hybrid model by gathering insights from leaders and experts. Thus, allowing the development of the theoretical framework with empirical findings to extend the model.

As the hybrid model includes a team and its leader, it is essential to view both team's and leadership's success factors to understand what makes the hybrid model to perform well. Team success factors include trust, cooperation, reliability, communication, social presence, and well-being. These factors directly influence the hybrid model's success. On the other hand, leadership success factors include trust, team cooperation,

environment, communication, social and cultural skills, social pressure, guidance, and planning and scheduling. Focusing on the different leadership success factors allows a leader to have a clear direction for a team, facilitate communication, provide possibilities for a team to excel, promote employees' satisfaction and well-being, create an innovative environment, and overall achieve the goals. However, in addition to the success factors, the hybrid model is dynamic and includes continuous two-way interaction between the team and leader. Hence, this study stresses motivation and comfort, self-management, innovation, and strategy and vision as crucial for the interaction between team and leader. Overall, addressing and prioritizing these factors enables the creation of an environment that enables the hybrid team to thrive, leading to the overall success of the hybrid model. However, this study does not take a stance on the relative importance or priority order of different factors within the hybrid model. Still, it acknowledges that all these factors are necessary for the hybrid model to perform well.

It was concluded that the hybrid model is dynamic model. Based on this study's findings hybrid model success factors include team and leadership success factors and the two-way interaction between a team and leader. Additionally, leaders must utilize different leadership strategies and methods to support an effective hybrid model. Moreover, through empirical findings, the study reveals guidelines for leaders to utilize in facilitating hybrid teams. The guidelines include seven groups of actions divided by different aspects of organizational culture, safe environment, open communication, providing guidance, continuous cooperation, innovativeness, and consideration. To facilitate a hybrid team, a leader must consider these different aspects to provide sufficient hybrid working arrangements for team to perform in a hybrid working environment. Through these guidelines, the hybrid model is adaptable and flexible for different teams and situations, combining virtual and on-site work elements. Thus, the hybrid model should always be applied to each team separately to suit the team.

The results are important as they will help leaders prevent pitfalls by leading a team in the right direction from the beginning. Behind a successful team is a good leader who trusts team members and offers them the conditions to make good decisions and act efficiently. A good leader understands that success depends entirely on team members' success, so a good leader support, encourages and guides employees. A good leader monitors the team's performance, e.g., the level of competence and well-being, and trusts the actions and decisions of employees. A leader prioritizes and sets appropriate goals together with a team. Moreover, a successful hybrid team is competent and self-initiated. A team has the conditions for the work and feels the goals are achievable. A team communicates openly and supports each other. Overall, by helping leaders to lead hybrid teams better, this thesis will improve the team's performance leading to improved results for the entire company.

## **5.2 Theoretical implications**

The study revealed that leading and working hybrid requires new ways of thinking and learning by trying and evaluating. This is aligned with the Gratton's (2022) research that moving towards a workable hybrid model requires leaders to change accustomed habits, start thinking from a broader perspective and include individual perspectives in the work arrangements. Additionally, this study states that individuals have crucial role in successful hybrid model. As the individuals' self-management skills becomes more important when working in hybrid working environment.

Mitchell and Brewer's (2022) research presents eight leadership strategies for leading in a hybrid work environment which this study supplements by dividing hybrid leadership into seven diverse groups of actions to include distinctive guidelines facilitating a hybrid team. These guidelines assist a leader in facilitating the hybrid team, which promotes shared decision-making and responsibility. Hence, this study of hybrid leadership also highlights the phenomenon of shared leadership. Shared leadership is an interactive process in which group members influence one another to promote and achieve

common organizational goals (Pearce and Conger, 2003). However, the findings disclosed hybrid leadership in addition to a mix of coaching, enabling and servant leadership styles instead of focusing on one leadership style. This study presents hybrid leadership as adapting to different environments and teams, combining various leadership styles rather than leading through a specific style. Hybrid leadership requires flexibility and adaption to situations.

It is interesting how the findings supported a virtual team and leadership success factors in the hybrid model's success factors (see Figure 6 and Figure 9). Dude and Marnewick (2016) suggest of a conceptual model to enhance and determine the performance of virtual teams. The study advances in hybrid point of view about the model to including well-being as a crucial factor of team's success. It is though provoking how significantly well-being importance appeared in the findings and how leader's and team's has a greater responsibility to consider various risk factors for well-being in a post-pandemic era. The findings revealed also motivation belonging to a team in accordance with the Dude and Marnewick's (2016) conceptional model. However, the findings highlighted motivation as a broader perspective. In the literature Dionisio (2022) presents two types of motivation – intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation can be person or task related. This type of motivation can be that individual perceives the work as purposeful, rewarding and the work has a reason. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is based on external factors. Such as, cash reward or fancy job title. The extrinsic motivation however works on more narrow perspective where the job task does not require creativity thinking, problem-solving, or the work task is simple and easy to repeat. Hence, the research findings also noted thought-provoking perspective of these motivating types. That all of the interviews highlighted the intrinsic motivation as an essential factor for hybrid model. Under the circumstances, can be seen that for the hybrid model is pivotal that the individuals have possibility to challenge itself, self-manage, and feel included and being part of the community. Where highlights that the work has a meaning.

### **5.3 Managerial implications**

The study brought out vital implications for managers in planning and structuring a company's outlines for the hybrid model and working environment. The first managerial implication is to avoid organizational bureaucracy for too strict compliance for the hybrid model. The hybrid model highlights agility and its dynamic attribute; hence a company needs to have flexible capabilities to implement it and modify it to suit the model for different levels of the organization. The second managerial implication is to manage by example, that leaders are aware of company's strategy and vision to be able and prepared to implement the strategy. This emphasizes a manager's ability to convey information and share responsibility with leaders. The third managerial implication is to develop leaders. To provide sufficient possibilities for leaders to train and develop their expertise. Further, the fourth managerial implication of the hybrid model is that important to consider that workspaces enable collaboration and chance encounters, and that company's office spaces are technically equipped for brainstorming, teamwork, and working with clients. It is essential to provide spaces for teamwork but also to be able to concentrate on quiet work. Hence, this emphasizes a company's responsibility to provide a sufficient working environment.

### **5.4 Limitations**

This thesis has specific limitations. First, there are some limiting aspects regarding the existing literature. As this thesis examines a new aspect of hybrid leadership, only a few articles about this topic have been published. Therefore, the theoretical support for the findings is limited. Also, articles that can be found on the matter are from the pre-pandemic and pandemic eras. Therefore, articles still need to provide a clear post-pandemic aspect of the hybrid model to study the matter more. Second, there are some limitations regarding the research method of this thesis. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine hybrid model and hybrid leadership. The total

number of interviews were thirteen, consisting of eight leaders and five employees. To get a wider understanding of the subject, the number of interviews should be multiplied.

## **5.5 Suggestions for future research**

For future research, different matters could be examined. First, investigating how organizations offer possibilities and support for leaders to succeed in leadership could be done. For example, by researching, do organizations offer training for leaders to have better tools to succeed in leadership. Second, it could be studied on a deeper level how cross-cultural environments affect hybrid leadership as this research studied hybrid team leadership more generally and did not consider deeper cross-cultural teams. Third, the same research could be conducted by interviewing with different industries to see whether the business industry affects the results. Fourth, this study's results highlighted an individual's importance of in a hybrid model. Therefore, it could be examined how the individual can be considered more when planning and organizing the work and hybrid model. In addition, the well-being and psychological environment of the individual should be researched more.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Semi-structured interview

#### Basic information:

Role:

Industry:

Team size and location:

Have you already been working in a virtual/hybrid manner before the pandemic? If yes, then for how long?

#### Leadership:

1. Briefly describe in your own words what is leadership?
2. Has hybrid work influenced to the leadership of the team? How?
3. What is the role of the leader in a hybrid work?
4. How is the role of leadership reflected in the hybrid work, both at office and when working virtually?
5. How do you experience the difference in leadership in a hybrid, both at office and when working virtually?
6. How would you describe unsuccessful hybrid leadership?
7. How have the challenges of hybrid leadership been addressed and overcome?
8. What do you see as the biggest factors in successful hybrid leadership?
9. Which leadership style do you believe is the most suitable for a hybrid team?
10. What are the benefits of hybrid leadership?
11. How do you implement successful hybrid leadership in your team/company?
12. Have you received/have you given feedback about hybrid leadership? What kind?

#### Team:

13. How has hybrid work been perceived within the team?
14. Is working on-site or virtually emphasized more within the team?
15. Is there an option within the team to work virtually or on-site?

16. Has the hybrid work environment posed challenges to the team? What kinds? What solutions have there been to this?

17. What are the biggest success factors for working effectively as a hybrid team?

18. How has working in a hybrid manner affected the team's work/ project completion?

19. How are the objectives set and monitored through hybrid work environment?

21. How has team spirit been created and maintained in a team that works in a hybrid manner?

22. Has there been a division within the team as a result of hybrid work?

23. How does social interaction work in a hybrid team? How is networking successful?

24. How the following factors have reflected in hybrid work and its success:

- Trust
- Communication
- Self-management
- Rewarding
- Team spirit

25. How would you describe a successful hybrid team and how to lead the team?