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**The Influence of Digital Leadership on Employee Performance in
the Hybrid Work Context of Technology-Based MNCs.**

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ABSTRACT:

The evolution of digital technologies has led multinational corporations to reorganize their work processes, and hybrid approaches have become the primary mode of operation. This study aims to examine the impact of digital leaders on the hybrid employees in technology based MNCs. Moreover, it explores into the deep of feedback-support loop of digital leader in hybrid environments. Finally, the study combine these two areas into a clear and transparent understanding approach that will outline the influence of digital leaders to employee work performance.

A qualitative approach was used in this study. The data for this study was collected through semi-structure interviews of employees working in various European and American technology based MNCs. The data was analysed and processed manually due to the small number of sample sizes. The sample consists of 7 employees working in hybrid setups in different technology based MNCs.

This study extracts the impact of digital leadership on employee performance in hybrid workplaces within technology based MNCs. The leader's consistent delivery of real-time feedback increased clear vision, goal, autonomy, and engagement. On the contrary, irregular availability reduced performance, specifically in an asynchronous, time-zone differentiated work place. Overall, the findings emphasize on the role of a digital leader as a key factor in sustaining employee long term performance in hybrid workplaces.

The thesis contributes to the understanding of digital leadership by developing a multiple sided model that includes more than technical competence and includes clarity, emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness. It offers new insights into hybrid work by recognizing certain unique circumstances, such as time zones and cultural differences, as distinct sources of emotional stress. Finally, a digital leader should integrate technological competence, emotional intelligence, consistent communication, and the ability to cope with the dynamic hybrid work environment.

KEYWORDS: Digital Leadership, Hybrid Work, Multi National Corporations, Employee Performance, Virtual Collaboration, Work from Home.

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Abbreviations

MNCs = Multi National Corporations

WTF = Work from Home

CAQDAS = Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Digital leaders use technology and serve the employees within the organization to facilitate communication, engagement, and collaboration. The technology leaders use to integrate digital tools and platforms to enhance the learning experiences to support and implement organisational goals (Assefa & Mujtaba, 2025). Fueled by the global COVID-19 pandemic, forecasts indicate that by 2030, remote work will comprise 70% of the global workforce, predominantly on a full-time basis (Lund et al., 2021).

The global business landscape has experienced a significant transformation after the COVID-19 pandemic, which had moved away from the traditional working style to a "new normal" characterized by hybrid work models (Ortiz, 2025). Based on a report of 2022, the figure had increased to 22%, with a further 17% adopting a hybrid working model that combined office work with remote work (Statista Research Department, 2023). The pandemic has also had a significant impact on European workers, with almost 40% of employees in the European Union (EU-27) switching to full-time teleworking during the outbreak (Eurofound, 2021).

The gradual increase of hybrid work settings has drawn attention to the concept of virtual team settings. Team virtuality refers to the subsets of a team that are across different geographical locations and depend on technology for interaction, collaboration, and communication. (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005; Brown et al., 2020).

The fastest digital change has transformed the way multinational companies (MNCs) operate, communicate, and manage their employees. As technology-enabled work structures are becoming more common, the hybrid work model, which blends remote and on-site arrangements, especially among technology-based multinational companies (Bellis et al., 2024). The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated this shift and put organisations under pressure to use digital tools and virtual collaboration platforms almost overnight. As a result, there has been a significant transformation in leadership practices, and scholars and

practitioners alike have begun to examine how leaders influence performance in the digitally mediated environment.

Further, digital leadership enables an agile and innovative culture that allows MNCs to best respond to the rapid changes in the technology and environment. Bellis et al. (2024) exhibit that digital leaders are crucial in supporting organisations to navigate in complex hybrid structures, through enabling physical and digital collaboration. Being able to adapt to various physical and digital environments is useful in technology-driven industries, where success is defined by innovation, speed and constant learning.

Digital leadership tackles many of these challenges, ensuring that employees are productive, supported and aligned with organisational expectations. It is also important to avoid digital burnout by helping them find the right use of the digital tools and ensuring they do not overload on communication (Patil & Kulkarni, 2025).

In Multinational Corporation the performance of the employees is also influenced by the complexity of the world operations. Hybrid work only makes these complexities even more pronounced since leaders are responsible for coordinating across cultural, time and geographic boundaries. Research on hybrid work in international business indicates that MNCs are confronted with further challenges and issues of coordination across borders, cultural diversity, and maintaining motivation and wellbeing in dispersed teams (Alkoud & Qatamin, 2023). Likewise, research on global virtual teams emphasises the working together of team members from different countries, linguistic backgrounds, and time zones and their dependence on primarily digital communication that fundamentally changes the demands of leadership (Jimenez et al., 2017). These insights contribute to the need to research the impact of digital leadership, especially in MNCs where hybrid work dynamics are embedded in cross-country collaboration and the greater international business context.

1.2 Research Question and Objectives

The purpose of this research is to provide a better understanding to researchers and Industry experts of how digital leadership shapes employee performance within the hybrid work environments of technology-based MNCs, and how leadership behaviours, digital tools, and communication practices influence employees' ability to maintain stable performance. Therefore, the primary research question of this study is:

1. How does the role of digital leadership influence employee performance in hybrid work environments of multinational companies (MNCs)?

In addition, to allow the research area to be covered, the following sub-questions have been created to support the primary research question:

2. Which digital leadership practices most effectively support or enhance employee performance in hybrid work settings?
3. What challenges do digital leaders and employees face in managing performance in hybrid MNC environments?

The research objectives are therefore divided into several key parts to guide the study in a clear and structured direction. First, an in-depth literature review on digital leadership behavioral impacts that shape employee work outcomes in hybrid MNC environments will be provided to give a general introduction to the research context. Second, a focused review of digital leaders provides feedback and support to the employees during hybrid work. Third, The study aims to integrate these two areas by developing a conceptual understanding of how digital leadership interacts with hybrid work characteristics to influence employee performance. Finally, this conceptual understanding will be further refined through empirical qualitative research, allowing the study to propose recommendations for digital leaders by experienced employees so that the digital leaders can own the characteristics that would be effective for influencing the work performance of hybrid employees.

1.3 Definitions of Key Concepts

Defining Digital Leadership

Digital leaders are the leaders who mainly use and manage technology, oversee virtually, and lead e-change to ensure success in new work settings, like remote work. (Ahuja et al., 2023). Digital leadership can be defined as the effective way of blending electronic and traditional methods of communication, implying awareness of current information and communication technology (ICT), selective adoption of new ICT for oneself, and the organizational and technical competence in using those ICTs selected (Van Wart et al., 2019). In this thesis, digital leadership refers to leaders' ability to use digital tools and virtual communication effectively to enhance clarity, collaboration, motivation, and performance within hybrid work structures of multinational corporations.

Hybrid Work

Hybrid work describes an environment in an organisation where employees choose both working remotely and on-site work. Hybrid work is a combination environment of working digitally and physically, which creates both flexibility and complexity. Based on the studies of hybrid work, this model, where digital technologies are used to enable employees to "operate more flexibly in different locations" (Ebojoh & Hogberg, 2024). For this thesis, hybrid work refers specifically to the working arrangement within technology-based MNCs where employees and leaders interact through a combination of digital platforms and in-office collaboration.

Employee Performance

Employee performance is the sum of effectiveness measured by the completeness of the employee's work tasks and their contribution to the organisational objectives. The effectiveness includes task performance, such as quality, timeliness, and accuracy of work and contextual performance, such as collaboration, adaptability, and organisational citizenship behaviours, and gradual digital performance capabilities in hybrid environments.

Digital leadership research shows that technology-based MNCs influence the job performance of employees by using some mechanisms such as clarity, engagement, concentration, and reduced barriers (Ongel et al., 2024; Toscano et al., 2025). In this thesis, employee performance refers to how effectively hybrid employees in technology-driven MNCs complete their tasks, maintain productivity, adapt to hybrid environments, and maintain goals set by their digital leaders.

Technology-Based Multinational Corporations (MNCs)

Technology-based MNCs are globally operated organisations whose products or services core value creation and delivery process depends on digital technologies, software systems, data infrastructures and innovation. These companies exist worldwide and largely rely on virtual collaboration and digital ecosystems to get jobs done. Global digital leadership study emphasises that in MNCs managers need to own digital literacy and have the ability to work with employees from different cultures, from different time zones throughout digital platforms (Lauring et al., 2025). In this thesis, technology-based MNCs refer to multinational firms whose operational, managerial and collaborative processes depend on digital technologies and who employ geographically distributed, hybrid teams.

Digital Tools in Leadership and Collaboration

Digital tools include communication tools, project collaboration software, knowledge sharing technologies used to support hybrid work. These tools allow leaders to assign tasks, track progress, communicate with the organisation's objectives, and support employee needs on a real-time basis. Studies highlight that the effective use of digital tools helps in increasing employees' interaction, supporting creativity, and reducing complexity (Bellis et al., 2024; Ebojoh & Hogberg, 2024). In this thesis, digital tools refer to the digital technologies enabling leaders to perform essential supervisory and supportive functions in hybrid MNC contexts.

1.4 Delimitation of the Study

This study is delimited in such a way to understand the influence of digital leadership on the performance of employees of hybrid work environments of technology-based multinational companies (MNCs), and the scope is intentionally made as narrow so that the concept would be clearer. The thesis focuses on digital leadership in its purely technology-mediated form, that is, on the way leaders employ digital tools, virtual communication and online collaboration systems to guide employees, rather than dealing with traditional or face-to-face leadership models (Rizvi & Ilyaz, 2025).

The empirical focus of the study is limited to technology-based MNCs, where digital infrastructure, cross-border collaboration, and technology-enabled processes are deeply embedded. Additionally, the study employs a qualitative semi-structured interview design, meaning it seeks interpretive insights rather than statistical measurement or causality testing, and therefore its findings are context-specific rather than universally generalizable within all types of multinational organizations.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters, designed to explore how digital leadership influences employee performance within the context of hybrid work in multinational corporations (MNCs). The structure is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter sets the research focus by explaining the importance of digital leadership, hybrid work and the MNC context. It defines the key concepts, makes the main research question as well as two sub-questions and outlines the delimitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines the available academic literature in order to address the research sub-questions. It is designed in two main sections: Part A focuses on the positive effects of digital leadership on employee performance, and Part B focuses on the negative effects and

limitations. The review contains literature pertaining to virtual teams to cover the virtual side of the hybrid work. The chapter concludes with a theoretical framework derived from the existing literature that demonstrates the relationship between digital leadership practices and employee performance before the data collection.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides details of the qualitative research design used in the research. It describes the context of the research, paying particular attention to technology-based MNCs that have hybrid work models. It further describes the participant selection process that consisted of approximately five digital leaders and five employees and explains the method of data collection in the form of semi-structured interviews and how the data was analyzed.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter contains the analysis of the data collected from the interviews. The results are organized to show the positive influences and the negative limitations of digital leadership on performance. It describes the unique ideas of leaders about their attempts to improve their performance and also the employees' experience of the effect of leadership on their performance results.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The last chapter is an interpretation of the results found in the research by comparing the empirical findings with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. It offers an altered final framework based on the original theoretical model but with specific empirical findings as to the context of the MNC hybrid. Furthermore, the chapter gives direct responses to the main research question as well as the two sub-questions, summarizes the theoretical and practical contribution of the thesis, and restates the limitations and delimitations of the research.

2 Literature Review

A systematic literature review (SLR) method was used to identify the factors that lead digital leaders to become great leaders who can positively influence employees and impact their performance in terms of a hybrid work environment in technology-based MNCs.

A list of keywords, including “digital leaders,” “hybrid work,” “remote job,” “leadership,” “virtual leadership,” “virtual team,” “digital communication,” “MNC,” and “tech-based MNC,” is used as a basis to identify the relevant papers in the Trironia and Finna repositories, which are further refined using inclusion and exclusion criteria.

2.1 Leadership in the Digital Era

In the digital era, both organizational phenomena and the tools used to study them are changing; thus, it is necessary to provide a new analytical lens through which these changes can be understood (Banks et al., 2022). Within this context, leaders are also faced with the need to establish and maintain socio-technical platforms that enable effective hybrid collaboration. Traditional leadership's influence on the 20th century's physical presence, implicit context sharing, nonverbal cues, and informal decision-making gave leaders enhanced visibility and awareness. However, the move towards hybrid work has changed these mechanisms of influence. Modern teams are now working together through cross channel communication and parallel virtual interactions, making coordination more complex. Similarly, leaders in hybrid environments need to be proactive in ensuring that the flow of information is through proper digital communication channels and to the relevant individuals in a timely manner to support effective collaboration and performance (Waduge, 2024).

2.2 Digital Leadership in Technology-Based MNCs

Digital leadership has become an essential trait among current MNC leaders especially in the case of technology-based MNCs. As digital technologies drive communications, coordination

and performance across an organization regardless of time, place and presence, effective leadership is required to guide organizations through the complexity of digital transformations. In a broader sense, digital leadership is defined as the competencies of leaders to align their initiatives in order to generate cultural changes and technological understanding. (Hung et al., 2023; Takyi et al., 2025).

The literature is consistent in highlighting the central role that leadership plays in driving digital transformation. Davison et al (2023), highlight the importance of technology not being a purely technological process but an organizational and cultural one, thus it is critical that the leader is able to align the digital initiatives with the strategic goals and to manage change in the complex organization structure as well Empirical evidence also shows that digital leadership is key to strengthening the link between digital transformation and organizational performance in terms of quality of decisions and organizational capabilities (Hung et al., 2023) Together, these researches show that leadership is not just a support factor but a key mechanism, through which digital transformation is converted into meaningful organizational outcomes.

Benitez et al. (2022) found digital leadership behaviors facilitate employee engagement during organizational transformation, this implies that leaders could build environments that encourage people to use new technologies and accept change. Mihiu et al. (2023) also said that the digital leaders help in creating a culture that values new ideas, collaborating across departments, and digital literacy. These are important in hybrid and globally fragmented workforces.

Digital leadership has also been linked to the development of organizational technological capabilities, which in turn support ongoing digital transformation. Persaud and Zare (2023) report a positive relationship between digital leadership behaviours and the development of technological capabilities in innovation-oriented enterprises. Similarly, Jiang et al. (2020) find that digital leaders enhance technological communication in IT-intensive environments, a factor that is critical for effective technology adoption and utilization. These results support

the argument that digital leaders foster the technological capacity that is vital to MNCs that face rapid technological changes. Significantly, earlier research cited in the paper shows that digital leadership helps to develop dynamic capabilities in organisations so that they can adapt themselves to market trends and technological changes. The studies by Ellström et al. (2021) and Cserdi et al. (2022) support the idea that digital leadership promotes team responsiveness and adaptability - capabilities that are especially important in the complex, transnational structures of MNCs operations. Moreover, according to researchers such as Balakrishnan & Das (2020), competent digital leaders are supportive of process innovation and organizational learning in allowing the company to incorporate digital tools into its operations more seamlessly.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that digital leadership not only assists people in using technology, but also aids in culture, creativity, the development of skills, and getting everyone on the same page in an organization. For tech-based MNCs who have hybrid work models, digital leadership becomes even more important as the leader needs to manage the teams across locations and assure proper communication, coordinate the digital workflows across boundaries, and maintain the performance standards. At this point, we must consider that digital leadership is fundamental to the success of digital transformation, better employee performance, but also to be competitive in the context of global hybrid work environments.

2.3 Communication Effectiveness

A powerful and influential leadership is required when an organization seeks to change into a digital firm (Sow & Aborbie, 2018). Aligning communication tools makes a digital leader more effective and influential in a hybrid work environment. In this study, among the different leadership styles explored, the research particularly focuses on digital leadership, as it is regarded as a practical approach due to its ability to foster positive employee behaviors (e.g., digital creativity) and benefits for specific workgroups and, indeed, entire organizations (Lee et al., 2017; Ribeiro et al., 2018). For a sustained competitive advantage and MNC's success,

technological and social challenges are most important (Haseeb et al., 2019). Managers who are responsible for delivering leadership must be developed to improve their competence, which is where the concept of “development,” such as capacity and capability development, skills and potential discovery and growth, and coaching and leadership development, comes in (Howieson and Grant, 2020). The responsible leaders who held influential power are crucial to shaping the company environment, inspiring their followers to embrace management techniques and achieve financial excellence (Rehman et al., 2021).

Digital Communication and Self-Efficacy

Tang and Wei (2022) found that performance and creative self-efficacy are significantly affected by ambidextrous leadership. A strong correlation was also established between perceived organizational support and systems self-efficacy and an increase in perceived usefulness as well as contentment with information systems (Cho et al., 2011). Efficacy in exploitation and exploration are positively affected by performance self-efficacy (Tang and Wei, 2022). Hambley et al. (2007) also found that the communication media utilisation had an impact on the collaboration approaches and integration of a team. Digital leadership ethics focus on clarity and visibility, which allows employees to feel valued and understood. Overall, communication efficacy is an aspect that links leadership and performance.

2.4 Virtuality of Team as Boundary Condition

Team virtuality has become more of a critical boundary condition affecting the manner in which digital leadership is translated into employee performance, especially in hybrid groups and tech-driven multinational organizations. Virtuality is the degree to which the teams are digital communication dependent, geographically dispersed, and in contact with less physical co-presence. High levels of virtuality alter the patterns of communication, trust-building, and coordination and thereby enhance or diminish the impact of leadership behaviors. Because the exercise of digital leadership takes place against technology-mediated settings, the virtual structure of teams is fundamentally responsible for either enabling or disabling the possibility of effective enactment of such leadership practices.

Research across the emerging hybrid work contexts consistently points to the fact that digital tools and communication platforms become imperative for leaders to guide and support team members in the absence of the face-to-face cues that are inherent in such contexts. Asfahani (2025) states that leaders need to offset the effects of higher ambiguity and the cultural distance in remote teams by using structured communication, conflict resolution skills, and the use of digital tools to keep teams cohesive and ensure clarity. Similarly, Ebojoh and Högberg (2024) argue that hybrid workplaces complicate leadership influence since leaders must ensure that the remote workers are included equally, manage the psychological distance, and uphold practices that are based on trust in distributed teams, and thus the virtuality itself becomes a condition that affects whether leadership strategies succeed.

Virtuality also moderates the effectiveness of specific leadership behaviors. In highly virtual teams, relational roles of leadership, such as mentoring, emotional support, and individualized consideration, require a proactive digital communication strategy. Rizvi and Ilyaz (2025) shows that relation-oriented digital leadership improves creativity performance by promoting psychological safety and open collaboration, although it depends on the intensity of remote working and the degree to which communication is mediated digitally. In contrast, when members of a team interact quite often in physical settings, others have found that the traditional leadership behaviors may more readily support informal learning, social bonding, and tacit knowledge sharing, which lessens the need for structuring mechanisms in the digital realm (Barnes et al., 2024).

From a global leadership perspective, virtuality magnifies the problems of cross-cultural communication. Luring et al. (2025) argue that digital global leadership is demanding advanced digital literacy and intercultural competencies, as dispersed teams work across time zones, linguistic variation, and differing digital norms, and as such, virtuality influences not only the effectiveness of communication in teams but also the relationship building and trust formation within teams.

Overall, the literature shows that team virtuality is not only a contextual background factor but also a boundary condition that influences the way, when, and to what level digital

leadership affects the results of employees. In Virtual environments, leaders will need to demonstrate higher levels of digital skills, enhanced levels of communication precision, and more deliberate trust-building approaches. On the other hand, in low-virtuality or hybrid teams, leadership influence may be spread between physical and digital interactions, minimizing the heavy reliance on digital mediation. As the concept of hybrid work becomes normalized, virtuality will continue to shape the conditions through which digital leadership increases clarity, motivation, creativity, and ultimately, performance of employees in multinational organizational environments.

2.5 Employee Performance in Hybrid Contexts

Employee performance in hybrid work environments has become an emerging topic in recent organizational research. Several research reveals how performance in such contexts is determined by a combination of autonomy, digital quality of communication, leadership behavior, and motivational enhanced employer performance during hybrid work. According to the current research, hybrid work does not shift the location of work but changes the psychological and the structural condition under which performance occurs. For example, Toscano et al. (2024) believe that employee performance (in hybrid settings) is affected by daily fluctuations in cognitive and emotional states. As they explain, "Working from home has an indirect positive relationship with job performance through daily concentration and work engagement." Their findings suggest that when employees have less interruptions and more cognitive clarity, the performance increases even without being physically present in the office.

At the same time, the same authors mention a possible opposite side, the indirect relationship of WFH with daily job performance via daily social isolation and work engagement was negative. In this way, while hybrid work can have positive motivational benefits, it can also come with risks that can undermine engagement if the social connection is not supported. Research on hybrid workplaces in general supports this duality.

Kumari et al. (2025) demonstrate that hybrid work arrangements can be beneficial for the performance and well-being of the worker provided there are meaningful engagement structures. They report that hybrid work has a significant and positive effect on employee performance, primarily because employees benefit from the flexibility and are better able to regulate their energy across work environments. However, their study also underlines that work engagement mediates these effects, which means that performance is not necessarily improved without employees feeling connected to their work and organization.

Other scholars stress the interrelatedness of hybrid employees with performance and adaptive capabilities. Tan & Antonio (2022) show that digital leadership indirectly supports the adaptability of employees, leading to performance outcomes. They state that perceived e-leadership influences employee adaptive performance indirectly, organizational commitment, and the feeling of purpose. This highlights that performance in hybrid environments is not only dependent on the execution of tasks but also on the availability of psychological resources such as purpose, commitment, and inherent motivation.

Moreover, the technological dimension of hybrid work played a decisive role. As the digital transformation accelerates, employees work in ever-complex digital ecosystems. Öngel et al. (2024) note that digital leadership reinforces performance by stimulating creativity in that individual creativity fully mediates the relationship between digital leadership and employee performance. Their results suggest that the performance is improved in the hybrid settings when leaders promote innovation and digital competence.

Finally, the literature on digital leadership confirms that the results in performance are greatly dependent on how leaders structure expectations and support. Ebojoh and Högberg (2024) agree that hybrid environments challenge the traditional practices for monitoring and require a shift in performance culture by leaders toward trust. Their systematic review finds leaders need to focus on equitable inclusion of remote workers and adapt their style to keep their team cohesive and productive. This implies that unless leaders consciously keep the

collaboration alive, employees might find it difficult to achieve the same performance at different locations.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the claim that digital leadership, to be defined as the strategic use of digital tools and communication technologies and human-centric leadership capabilities, plays a vital role in shaping employee performance in the hybrid work contexts of technology-based multinational corporations (MNCs). Hybrid work models have changed working structures in that this combination of onsite and remote work forces leaders to influence performance using digitally mediated interactions instead of through traditional physical oversight. In this environment, digital leadership becomes a key behavioral and communicative mechanism for motivating, engaging, creating, adapting and being productive in geographically spread teams.

The figure 1 below represents the theoretical framework illustrating how digital leadership shapes employee performance in hybrid work environments within technology-based MNCs. Digital leadership strategies influence hybrid work processes, which interact with the challenges employees face in distributed settings. These flows represent both performance barriers and support factors that affect employee well-being, motivation, and engagement. Together, the framework determines overall employee performance outcomes and contributes to the success of hybrid work in multinational organizations.

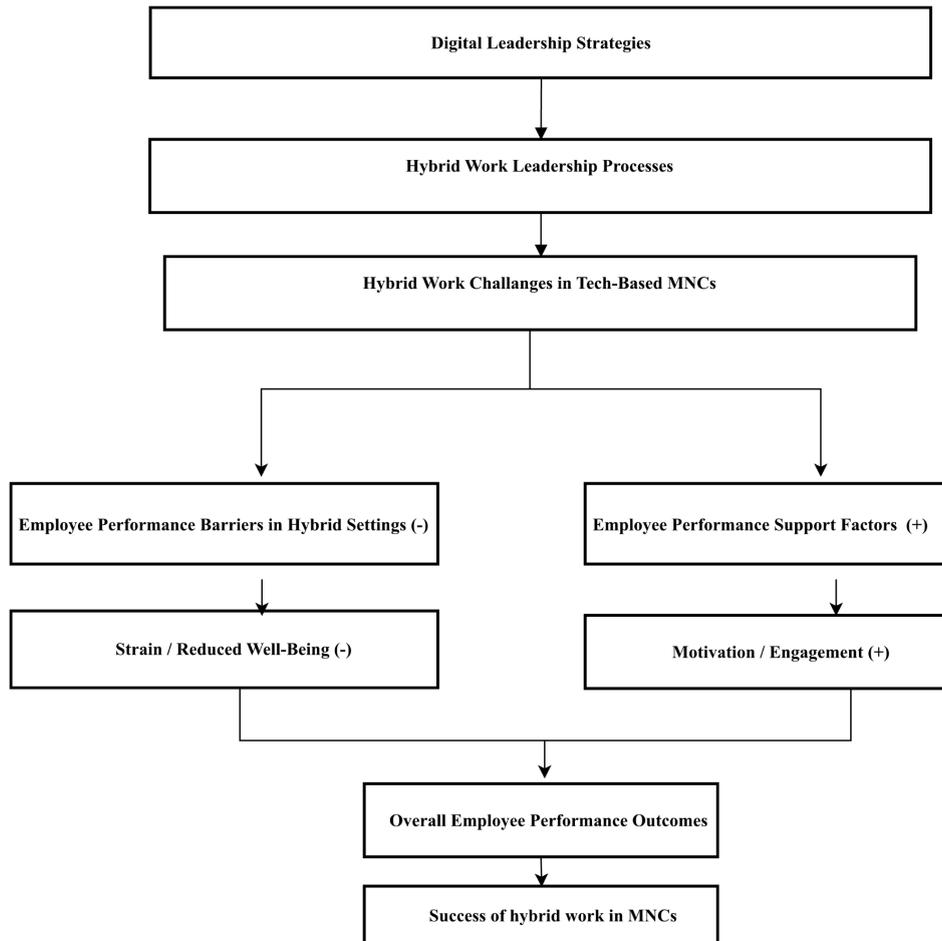


Figure 1: Digital Leadership–Employee Framework

The literature that is currently present highlights that leaders who are digital, have excellent communication skills and establish virtual relationships founded on trust are more effective in managing hybrid teams. In hybrid teams, transformational and authentic leadership styles are identified to create trust, engagement and psychological safety resulting in improved employee performance (Mutha and Srivastava, 2023).

The effectiveness of digital communication and trust in mediating the level of engagement is the focus of their research that demonstrates that leadership has a direct and indirect impact on the performance in relation and communication-based channels. Along with this view,

empirical data proves that digital leadership can improve personal creativity, hence, contributing to the improved outcomes of task and context related performance. Digital leadership is a full mediator of performance of employees based on creativity (Ongel et al., 2023), which implies that digital leaders affect the performance of employees working in hybrid workflow through promotion of innovation, idea generation, and problem-solving behaviors among them.

Digital leadership encourages knowledge-sharing behaviours that improve performance in technology-based MNCs, alongside psychological and interpersonal factors. For instance, knowledge-oriented leadership enhances employees' creativity in the workplace and their digital citizenship behaviour, boosting the performance of knowledge workers and the overall success of the organisation, during the COVID-19 era (Gu et al., 2025). In this manner, digital leadership in MNCs helps keep employees on track with the organisation's goals, working at different times, from different cultures. These strategies together support the concept that digital leadership operates through creativity, engagement, effective communication, trust, self-efficacy, and knowledge-sharing practices to improve employee performance in hybrid workplaces.

A further indication of inadequate digital leadership is digital micromanagement that occurs when so much monitoring or reliance on digital tracking technologies leads to people being less independent and less motivated to do their best work - both of which are important for good performance in knowledge-intensive hybrid positions. Leadership capability gaps are another cause of underperformance; new competencies required in hybrid environments, e.g. virtual empathy, digital fluency, asynchronous coordination skills and cross-platform communication expertise, are underdeveloped in many leaders because of a lack of training or outdated management assumptions (Ebojoh & Högberg, 2024). Hybrid scheduling is complex for leaders, as they have to balance the demands, manage the work-life boundaries and even deal with different time zones and workflows, which makes it harder for them to support their employees consistently (Barnes et al., 2024).

By integrating these thoughts, the theoretical framework approaches digital leaders influences employee performance in the hybrid MNC through enabling and limiting structures. The positive ways, innovation, trust, effective communication, work engagement, self-efficacy, and digital citizenship behaviour - reflect how digital leadership leads to better performance through psychological resource activation, relational relationships, and knowledge-driven productivity. The negative ways include digital overload, communication misalignment, hybrid inequities, techno-stress, leadership capability deficiencies, and digital micromanagement, which suggest that digital leadership could also be a limiting or hampering factor if not exercised with awareness of the hybrid context.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Context

This study uses a qualitative research approach in analyzing the role of digital leadership in determining employee performance in hybrid working environments in technology-based multinational corporations (MNCs). A qualitative approach is suitable since the research seeks to delve into human experiences, leadership behaviours, communication practices and working dynamics that demand in-depth and descriptive understanding. Previous studies emphasize the relevance of studying leadership in digital mediated labour settings where labour practices are influenced by remote and hybrid modes.

In this regard, Asfahani (2025) emphasizes on the necessity of understanding the digital leadership dynamics of hybrid employees while Ebojoh and Högberg (2024) identify that leadership in hybrid workplaces involves distinct challenges that benefit from qualitative, context-sensitive inquiry. Hybrid work brings new challenges in terms of communication, coordination, trust, monitoring performance and technological dependency. Such challenges are often complex and vary from person to person, hence the value of qualitative inquiry to capture such variations.

Studies emphasize how the qualities of a leader in the hybrid workplace have increasingly been based on such behaviours as empathy, clarity of communication, the use of digital tools, and the development of employee well-being can be explored more effectively through open conversations than using rigid questionnaires (Barnes et al., 2024). Similarly, the research on the hybrid workplaces indicates that the performance of the employees is influenced by flexibility, engagement in work, concentration and ability to manage the digital interaction, and benefit from qualitative exploration (Kumari et al. 2025; Toscano et al. 2025).

Semi-structured interviews are chosen as a method of data collection which gives the participant the freedom to express their views towards digital leadership behaviours,

communication effectiveness, technological support, challenges and performance-related experiences. This open-ended format also allows for the researcher to ask follow-up questions and dig deeper for understanding. Previous literature recommends interviews for studying digital leadership and hybrid work as they help to identify the way employees and managers address the negotiation of working in the virtual world, digital expectations, and the dynamic work culture. (Tan & Antonio, 2022; Rizvi & Ilyaz, 2025).

In summary, the qualitative research approach enables this study to gather rich, detailed and experience-based information on corporate leadership impact on employee performance in hybrid MNC settings. It offers the depth required for both understanding real practices, challenges and behaviours within the digitalised workplaces and adds meaningful insights to the academic literature and organisational practice.

3.2 Research Design

The research design that has been used in the present thesis is a qualitative, exploratory research design on the phenomenon of digital leadership in the technology sector. Unlike the single case study form of research, which looks at a particular organizational unit, this research uses a semi-structured interview approach. This approach was chosen to get the deep insights and experiences of the employees and leaders working across the different technology-based MNCs. By increasing the scope from an individual organization, this design offers the possibility to find out industry-wide patterns as to how digital leadership behavior and communication-feedback channels influence employee performance in hybrid work environments.

The data collection is going to be done using semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen because it offers a guided yet flexible exploration of the subject of research. As noted by Hughes et al. (2020), the use of a structured or semi-structured interview format helps in reducing bias from the interviewer and ensures that all the respondents are addressing the same core themes.

This balance is critical for this study to ensure that while individual experiences in different MNCs are captured, the data remains comparable and rigorous enough to identify common positive and negative influences of digital leadership. This balance is critical for the study, as it ensures that individual experiences across the various MNCs are represented, while maintaining sufficient comparability and being rigorous enough to identify common positive and negative influences of digital leadership.

Furthermore, the design adopts an interpretive approach in the process of searching for patterns in the data obtained that are related to the theoretical framework set up in the literature review. The study targets a specific group of people, i.e., Hybrid employees working in the technology sector, to provide solutions as per their direct experiences and available literature. Ultimately, this qualitative design gives the needed depth to answer the research questions on how digital leadership practices can be optimized to improve employee performance in a hybrid MNC context.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Primarily data was collected through a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method in which respondents receive the same set of questions in the same order. Using a semi-structured interview as a data collection method decreases the risk for interviewer bias when all respondents respond to similar sets of questions. The approach supports the purpose of identifying key factors that impact their hybrid workplace through the digital leader's behavior and its effect on their work performance.

Moreover, to receive responses from all relevant individuals and make participating in the research easier, responding to the interview questions has been made easier. The interview is written and conducted in the participants' native language.

The respondents remain anonymous in this study. To distinguish between the respondents, codes A, B, C, D, E, F and G replace the names of individuals. The interview link was sent to

the participants via email and WhatsApp. The respondents were given 10 days to complete the interview. All participants responded to each interview question. The interviews included the definitions of key terms and concepts.

Interviewee	Code	Duration (Min)
1	A	38:40
2	B	24:22
3	C	12:04
4	D	21:31
5	E	12:51
6	F	08:26
7	G	13:11

Table 1. Overview of the Participants

3.4 Data Analysis Strategy

In this thesis, the process of data analysis was done manually because of the small number of samples and the lack of access to Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). Manual analysis is also a tried and tested method of qualitative research, especially when working with limited datasets that provide room for becoming immersed in participant narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach also facilitates close contact between the researcher and the data and facilitates interpretive accuracy and sensitivity to themes.

Data preparation started with the transcription of the interviews. Thanks to the automatic transcription and note taking feature of Microsoft Meeting, complete transcriptions of each interview could be downloaded directly from the meeting software as soon as each session was completed, greatly cutting the time required to transcribe the interviews. Automated transcription tools are becoming better known for their usefulness in qualitative research

where they can help streamline data handling without sacrificing enough accuracy for later analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). However, as per best practices, the transcripts were manually reviewed for accuracy. Any errors, misheard words, or unclear sections generated by the auto-transcription system were corrected in order to make sure that the final transcripts reflected the intended meanings of the participants.

Transcripts of the interview were reviewed and verified on a repetitive basis. During the initial phase, careful checking was carried out in order to ensure the accuracy of the automated transcription through a comparison with the original audio recordings. This process was focused on identifying and correcting misheard words, unclear expressions, and contextual inaccuracies especially in relation to digital leadership, hybrid working experiences, communication practices, and employee performance. By reading through multiple times, the transcripts were improved to avoid ambiguity, and to have a solid basis for further analysis and interpretation. This thematic analysis approach is consistent with the qualitative methodologies which are concerned with the identification of meaningful relationships within the data and their interpretation with respect to the research questions (Nowell et al., 2017).

Throughout the analysis process, reflexive memo-writing and repeated reading of transcripts was used to increase the depth of analysis and transparency of interpretation. These procedures ensured that the emerging themes were based on participant accounts rather than researcher assumptions. Ultimately, the use of systematic and manual thematic analysis enabled the development of coherent themes that directly informed the findings on how digital leadership influences employee performance in hybrid multinational corporation (MNC) environments.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

Ethical considerations are important in qualitative research because the qualitative research method is dependent on the willingness of the research participants to share their personal

perceptions, experiences, and organizational realities. For this study, all research activities were conducted in accordance with the basic principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity and responsible handling of sensitive workplace information. Prior to data collection, each participant was informed about the purpose of the study, i.e., to explore the influence of digital leadership on employee performance in the hybrid work environment in technology-based MNCs. Participation was completely voluntary, and participants were told that they could leave the study at any point without consequences. With the explicit permission of the interviewees, video interviews were recorded, and will be used only for the verification purposes by the thesis supervisor; these will not be shared beyond the supervisory review process. The above measures are consistent with ethical protocols that are frequently used in leadership and remote work studies, where the sensitivity of managerial practices, workplace performance, and organizational change necessitates increased attention to participant autonomy and data confidentiality (Barnes et al., 2024).

Confidentiality was guaranteed by anonymizing all identifiable information. No organizational names, job titles or contextual markers were revealed in the thesis. Audio and video tapes and written transcripts were kept in a secure place and accessible only to the supervisor for verification. Given that digital leadership studies are often associated with discussions about managerial behavior, organizational policies and work systems mediated through technology, protecting participants' identities was critical to managing the risks, protecting their professional relationships and ensuring honest responses.

4 Findings

This chapter discusses the qualitative results that were obtained from 7 in-depth semi-structured interviews with employees working in hybrid positions in technology based MNCs. The purpose of the research is to understand the impact of digital leadership in hybrid work scenarios (communication practices, leadership behaviours, cultural and time zone issues and perceived support structures within multinational companies MNCs) and how employees perform. With the informed consent of each participant, interviews were recorded and used automated translation features. The study did not use the CAQDAS software but rather it was done manually using a structured reading and categorisation approach through thematic analysis of statements.

In this chapter, each participant's interview video and audio are preserved exactly as spoken. All quoted material is presented in italic and attributed to each interviewee by code name. No ellipses, no summarisation, and no shortening of direct speech have been applied. This approach ensures the original meaning, tone, and contextual nuance of each participant's lived experience remain intact.

4.1 Overall Experience of Hybrid Work in Tech MNCs

The totality of the experience of hybrid work among the employees of technological multinationals reflects the combination of flexibility, global collaboration, and growing dependence on digital communication practices. The interviewees' experiences provide in-depth descriptions of what hybrid work looks like in the real world of multinational workplaces.

At First, the interviewees were asked to share their overall experience in their existing MNC where they work in Hybrid settings. While describing their experience, most of them shared the positive sides: they learned many new things by joining the hybrid work; it saves their time and provides comfort; and some of them were so satisfied with their independent

working hours, which indicates that most participants feel delighted in their current workplace.

Interviewee A stressed that digital platforms that connect colleagues across geographical and cultural barriers make it easier to work with colleagues from different regions of the globe. Similarly, Interviewee D also expresses his feelings towards the virtual environment, which makes him feel so delighted that it seems he is working at the same desk, even though his colleagues are connecting from different corners of the world.

“My overall experience iswork with colleagues from different countries. In my current project, I work with people from across Europe, the UK, and the USA. I learned different cultural aspectsworking with a diverse workforce. This is one of the biggest skill sets the German corporate sector looks for: they want to see if a candidate can manage cultural differences, build trust, and ensure these differences. I adapted fast, and I feel lucky. These things aren't taught at university; In order to survive or keep your job you must learn them yourself. (Interviewee A)

“As you know, we are working remotely, so we need collaboration in our teams. Most collaboration is done through video calls, chatting, messaging, and documentation. In our company....we collaborate using tools; mostly Microsoft Teams, email, and chat. The environment is mostly remote. I have never visited the actual company office in Lithuania...We trust each other's capabilities...don't speak the same native language, but communicate in English. So we rely on communication to make the environment feel like we are working at the same desk.” (Interviewee D)

Interview E sees a great opportunity in a hybrid work environment, and his central point is joining an office that does not have such traditional official requirements. Interview C also found it an advantage that he does not need to travel as much on

public transport, as working remotely saves him time and reduces the additional stress of travel.

I would say it's a good opportunity for me to work as a virtual assistant. I work remotely, so I don't have to go to any physical office; it's a virtual office. It's a good place, because I don't have strict official requirements like physical jobs. I do my work, and it's easier than other official jobs. Also, compared to other jobs, it is better in terms of salary and opportunities. (Interviewee E)

"I feel more energized when I work from home because I do not need to take trains or buses. It takes one hour for me to go to the office, so working remotely makes me feel more productive" (Interviewee C).

"I could log in earlier and check daily tasks before 9:00 AM. Working remotely saved transportation time because in Bangladesh the traffic jams are huge, and I used to spend two to three hours on the road" (Interviewee B).

Similarly, Interview B experienced time flexibility in the hybrid work arrangement, which saved him time from traveling to the office, as his commute to the office is often congested.

4.2 Digital Tools Used by Leaders and Employees

Several participants identified communication platforms as the central part of their hybrid work ecosystems. For some, Microsoft Teams was the core medium through which they coordinated on a daily basis. Participants also highlighted how remote and hybrid work is highly dependent on online platforms and digital structured processes

They are asked about the tools their leaders use to communicate with them; most commonly, they use Microsoft Teams. Coincidentally, the interview with all of them was taken by Microsoft Teams. Interviewee A mentioned that his leaders primarily use email,

instant messaging platforms, and video conferencing software to communicate. These tools are essential for maintaining clear and efficient communication in hybrid work environments.

“Every company has a communication tool. Here we use Microsoft Teams. Teams allows group chats and specific channels. For example, there’s an “office” channel for office-related questions. There are channels where employees cannot post, and only leaders share updates and decisions. We also use Microsoft-based tools to assign work hours. Leaders can see how many hours each project or team is using and decide if they need to hire more people or redistribute workload. They can also see ROI, project capacity, and decide if someone needs to be fired or moved to another project. (Interviewee A)

Similarly, Interviewee B used Microsoft Teams. However, during meetings with other MNC vendors, his leader uses Zoom. Moreover, during unofficial conversations or quick updates, his leader often uses WhatsApp. The advantage of Microsoft Teams that all other respondents found is the ability to share their screen with their leaders when seeking assistance from them and colleagues.

“We used Microsoft Teams actually. Yeah, Microsoft Teams. We also used Zoom, especially in the case of vendor meetings. If we had to do meetings with vendors, then mostly we used Zoom, and for official purposes within Wipro, we used Microsoft Teams. WhatsApp was also available for quick updates and chatting. If there was any problem or issue, we used to get notifications from the WhatsApp group. Our team leader used to give instructions if I had to perform any tasks, especially during night maintenance activities. I had to prepare proper MOP and SOP for the activities and show/approve them through Microsoft Teams by sharing my screen. If any changes were needed, he used to instruct accordingly. So this is how these things were done.” (Interviewee B).

However, Interviewee C's leader's communication was better than the others', as he used Slack for communication and Jira for task management. With these tools, his

leader can track his day-to-day progress and address ongoing issues. Moreover, Interviewee D's leader used mails apart from Microsoft teams.

"We mainly use Slack for communication and Jira for task management, and any communication happens through Jira or Slack. Jira is where we get assigned tasks, track tasks, and update progress, and Slack is where we discuss issues and get clarifications." (Interviewee C)

"Our company uses Microsoft Teams. We use it for daily coordination, daily standups, sprint planning, and one-to-one communication. Apart from Teams, we also use emails for communication with other teams because there are multiple teams in the company. Most communication is done on Microsoft Teams and emails." (Interviewee D)

Interview F's leader was more informal and kept in touch with him regularly via WhatsApp and, if necessary, communicated via email.

"I think it's the fastest way to communicate, to use these digital platforms; we can get connected to each other, and if there are some urgent issues that arise, people can quickly respond, see this, for example, in WhatsApp or in emails. And then if it's necessary, we will have meetings." (Interviewee F)

These examples reflect the fact that hybrid work in MNCs is not separate from the use of specialized communication platforms through which these tasks are coordinated, progress tracked, and teamwork facilitated across borders.

Overall, from the interviews, it can be observed that digital tools in hybrid tech MNC environments are used as systems for communication, allocating tasks, monitoring, support, documentation, and decision-making. These platforms do not just support work; they actively organize ways of doing work, ways of enacting leadership, and ways of assessing performance. The effectiveness of hybrid work, therefore, depends not only on how readily

digital tools are available but also on how leaders and employees use them to keep geographically dispersed teams clear, responsive, and collaborative.

4.3 The Behavioral Impact of Leadership on Hybrid Employees

This section explores the dynamics between leadership behaviors and the resulting motivation, performance, engagement, and emotional state of the employees in the hybrid MNC work environment, which includes both positive and negative behavioral impacts.

Leadership behaviors in the context of hybrid MNC environments have a great impact on how an employee feels towards their work, how they handle a challenge, and how they maintain their motivation. Across all of the interviews, participants identified various behaviors - some supportive and empowering, some stressful or limiting - that impacted their job satisfaction, clarity, psychological well-being, and performance outcomes. These effects were intimately linked with the way in which leaders communicated, clarified tasks, responded to issues, shared out the workload, and worked with the cultural and time zone complexities.

4.3.1 Positive Behavioral Impacts

Thirdly, employees share several experiences that positively influenced their work performance during hybrid work settings:

Interviewee A, who worked for a German-based MNC, shared strong relational behaviours that played an important role. His leader's support had an emotional dimension, as his leader treated them and other colleagues as family. His trust in his leader and social engagement made him comfortable with this leader. Such behavior helped to prevent burnout and encouraged an environment of psychological satisfaction.

“My working model is hybrid. I live far from Berlin, so I only go one day a week. If I go more in one week, I don't need to go the next week. The positive side is our

team lead. We have a very diverse team: two British, one Ukrainian, one Pakistani Italian, and me (Bangladeshi). My boss is British, and she tries her best to make the team feel like a family. She creates trust and encourages open communication. She organizes... workshops and team activities. We discuss how we can support each other based on our roles. For example, I work with the data team and provide insights to colleagues for their client meetings. These behaviors make me feel valued and help me to stay dedicated.” (Interviewee A)

Interviewee C did not share much about his leader's behavior that positively influenced his work experience, but he briefed about how he worked remotely without prior communication or an offline meeting.

“The leadership is good. Since we have a hybrid work culture, normally we have the whole meetings and everything we do when we are present in the office. Most remote work we do without much communication, because it's really hard to communicate when you work remotely. So if we need to discuss any feature, we discuss it when we are in the office, and then we decide what to do. Then when we work remotely, it doesn't make any problem. So this is the way our leader tells us to work, and we follow it. (Interviewee C)

Interviewee D mentioned the digital leader's participation in his problem-solving. He finds leaders helpful when he is stuck on a complex problem-solving issue, and he receives immediate support from a digital leader who conveys positive energy during work hours.

“So in hybrid settings, the team lead plays an important role by giving us clear direction on what we need to do. Before each new sprint, we communicate with the team lead, business analyst, and developers about how we will proceed. They prepare the tasks, and we discuss how to do them in the coming week. Everyone gives their opinion. For example, sometimes I might say we should not do a task this week because it has dependency with another team. She (our team lead)

listens to our opinions and then decides the plan. So the most important thing for our leader is listening to the engineers and considering their opinions. (Interviewee D)

Similarly, Interviewee B shared that the clear instructions and communication from his leader made hybrid work more manageable. And the leader set up meetings, which seemed so optimistic, to help him gain clarity, better understand the problem, and boost work performance.

“If I faced any difficulties regarding the tasks or ticket issues, then my team leader used to help me through one-to-one meetings or through email instructions. He used to provide documentation links or proper details so that I could understand the issue clearly. Sometimes he used to arrange meetings with vendors, and after discussions things became clear” (Interviewee B)

Lastly, Interviewee E also shared his experience with the clarity and accuracy he found in his digital leader's behaviours, which made him feel strongly positive, even in the context of remote work in a freelance setting. Thus, attention to detail helped him understand the complex task and improve performance consistency.

“It's pretty straightforward. My boss gives me clear instructions on what needs to be done. I follow them and make sure everything is done precisely. This motivates and inspires me to work faster. It also helps my personal goals. Since I work from home, it is a different scenario from a physical office. When everything gets done easily, it's a good thing for me. My boss gives me clear instructions by sending screenshots, voice messages, or sometimes recorded videos, and this makes it easier for me to understand what I need to do” (Interviewee E).

A consistent theme throughout the interviews was that clear, proactive and supportive leadership behaviours had a strong positive influence on the performance of and general work experience for employees. Employees stressed over and over again how leaders who were able to communicate with clarity, offer timely assistance, and give emotional support

helped them continue to be motivated and productive even when they had to work remotely.

Many participants find leaders helpful when solving complex issues and receive support from a digital leader, who provides positive energy during work hours. Some behaviour encouraged teamwork and minimised the loneliness that is usually realised during remote work. Across all of the interviews, positive leadership behaviours had a number of features in common:

Positive Leadership Behaviour	Number of Participants Mentioning It (N=7)	Percentage (%)
Clarity and precision of communication	7	100%
Responsiveness to employee issues	6	85.7%
Mediation between teams	5	71.4%
Facilitation of teamwork and emotional support	6	85.7%
Providing positive motivation	4	57.1%
Reducing feelings of loneliness in remote settings	5	71.4%

Table 2 : Frequency of Positive Leadership Behaviours Reported by Participants

Taken together, these behaviours enhanced employee satisfaction, reduced errors, strengthened trust, and supported high levels of performance in hybrid work settings, as illustrated in Figure 2, Core Dimensions of Positive Digital Leadership in Hybrid Work.

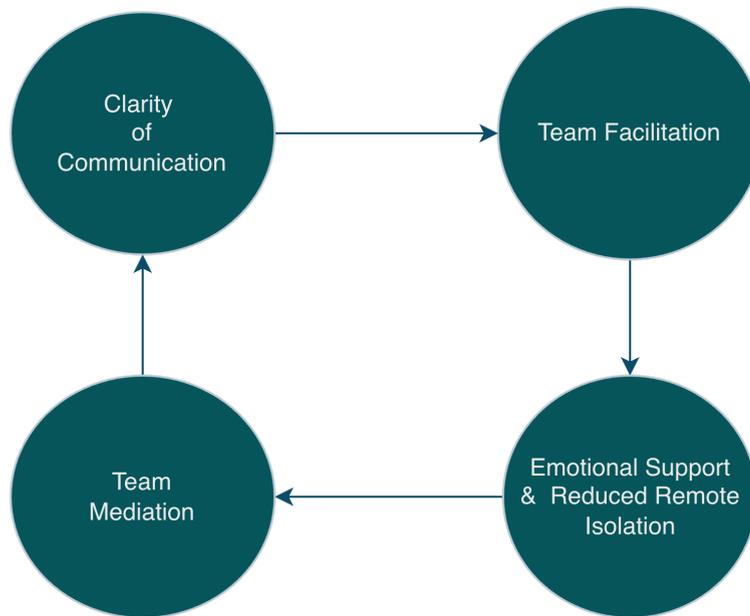


Figure 2: Core Dimensions of Positive Digital Leadership in Hybrid Work

4.3.2 Negative Behavioral Impacts

While there were many behaviours that supported leadership, there were also negative or challenging behaviours which hindered performance, caused stress or reduced motivation in the employees. These behaviours were often related to unclear communication, inconsistent availability, poor warning of instructions or emotionally distant interactions in digital environments.

A few participants shared behavioral impacts that negatively affected their work experiences. Only Interviewees A, B, and D reported negative behavioral impacts from a digital leader,

while the remaining Interviewees said they had never experienced such impacts from a leader.

Interviewee A shared the horrible story of losing his colleagues due to his company's layoffs without prior notice, which left him in extra fear that he, too, could lose his job at any time. Although the upper-level leaders decide who to keep and who to fire, they didn't provide prior notice, and they just made the decision. Such experience is evidence of how virtual communication can be emotionless and detached when dealing with organisational layoffs.

"Well, I mean there are certain negative digital leadership behaviors. For example, like last week our company downsized..... they fired 3 individuals and they really did not give a big reason for why such layoffs. And it was mostly digital. So I was, I just learned about it basically going to a company meeting... They actually dissolved one whole business unit. So a lot of individuals were working... And so I think this is one of the negative things that you never know like when you're going to lose your job. And for them, the leaders, it's very easy to just set up a meeting and they just say.....Just for surviving or the situation actually demanded that we downsize and stuff like that without really giving a proper reason behind probably one of the negative things of digital leadership behaviors." (Interviewee A)

Interviewee B experienced barriers in communication between the call centers and time zone barriers with his digital leader. Language barriers that he had with his European colleagues because of differences in accent between them, which resulted in misunderstanding of collaborative work. Moreover, it seemed awkward to him that he had been given an extra task in the last hour, making him work an extra hour, and stressful. Cultural and accent misunderstandings that leaders were not proactively addressing also had negative behavioural impacts.

“Sometimes, yes. Not everything is perfect. The most common negative issue is misunderstanding. Since we are not native speakers of their language, and they are Lithuanian, sometimes misunderstandings happen. Another issue is work culture differences. Sometimes we work extra hours because of the time zone difference. Our time zone is 4 hours ahead, so sometimes they arrange meetings in their last hour, which becomes our evening. We still have to attend, and that creates a negative impact. Communication gaps and misunderstandings happen sometimes. These are the only negative issues that I found.” (D)

Lastly, Interviewee B faced issues because he was given multiple tasks to work on simultaneously. Moreover, instruction was not provided correctly. He needed to figure things out on his own without the digital leader's assistance. Unclear instructions often create challenges and slow down regular tasks, leading to mental stress during hybrid work. Additionally, the workload pressure given by the digital leaders sometimes creates burnout among employees.

“Sometimes I was supposed to do one thing, but multiple tasks used to come to my ticket portal at the same time, and clear instructions were not provided. Sometimes I needed split instructions from the customer side” (B)

These scenarios reflect how extreme workloads are not adequately managed, and insufficient attention is paid to employees' well-being, which negatively affects hybrid employees' mental health. Furthermore Figure 3 represent the negative behavioral impacts on employees

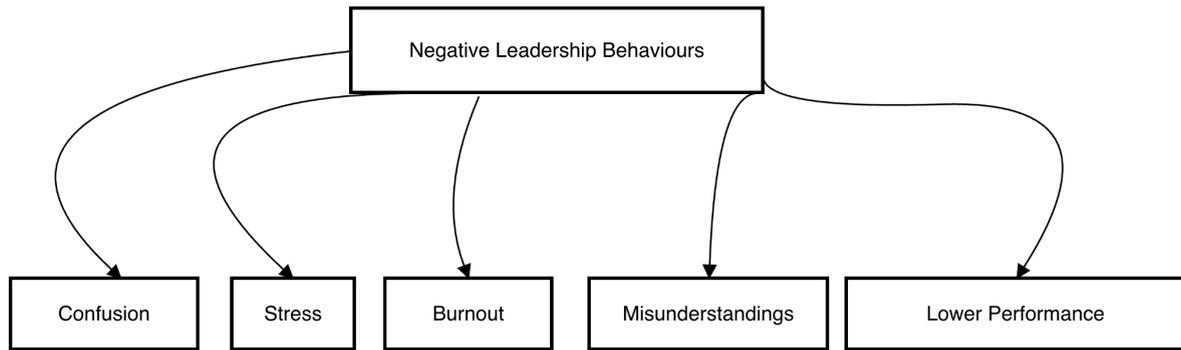


Figure 3: Negative Behavioural Impacts on Employees

4.3.3 Overall summary of Behavioral Impacts

The interviews show that the behaviours of digital leadership have an extreme impact on hybrid employee experiences. Positive behaviours increased productivity, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being. On the other hand, negative behaviours, such as poor communication, unavailability, cultural differences, and digital detachment, are reasons employees often face challenges such as frustration and emotional stress.

Negative Leadership Behaviour	Observed Impact on Hybrid Employees
Unclear or inconsistent communication	Generates confusion, increases errors, and reduces employees' confidence in task execution.
Leader unavailability during critical moments	Problems remain unresolved, operational delays occur, and employees feel unsupported in digital settings.
Poorly timed instructions or last-minute task assignments	Forces employees to work beyond normal hours, heightens pressure, and disrupts work-life balance.
Excessive workload without guidance	Leads to cognitive overload, emotional exhaustion, and burnout, particularly in remote task environments.

Cultural, linguistic, or accent-related misunderstandings	Creates communication gaps, reduces team cohesion, and slows cross-country collaboration.
Digital detachment during sensitive organisational events	Leadership appears distant or unemotional (e.g., layoffs communicated via online meetings), causing insecurity and emotional strain.

Table 3: Negative Digital Leadership Behaviours and Impact on Hybrid Employees

In the hybrid MNC contexts, Communication mostly depends on digital tools, and the dealership behavior is more visual. Clear, empathetic and structured leadership reinforces performance while vague, delayed or insensitive behaviours can have a significant inhibiting effect on employees working across time zones and cultures. The findings therefore highlight that behavioural consistency, clarity and emotional intelligence are critical elements of successful digital leadership in the hybrid work context.

4.4 Goal Setting and Communication Clarity

Goal clarity and communication effectiveness became key features of digital leadership in hybrid MNC environments. Employees were consistent throughout the interviews in saying that clear instructions and practices for goal setting, and clear and timely communication were key for maintaining productivity and alignment in remote and hybrid work environments. Participants shared ways in which leaders leveraged digital platforms and established processes to establish expectations for the day, week, project, etc. Participants also shared instances where unclear and delayed communication led to confusion or challenges in completing task work.

Interviewee B said that his leader provided clear instructions and assigned tasks on Microsoft Teams. Routine weekly check-ins; the leader follows up on the progress of tasks assigned to employees. At the end of the week, he needs to provide weekly reports to their client to show the progress of his ongoing task. Similarly, Interviewee D's leader also plans weekly, and his leaders put him in a meeting with the business analyst team. There, he discusses everything about their task, and if he faces any issues, he raises them with their digital leaders and finds a way to solve them.

Interviewee C also found things simple and straightforward. In his case, progress had to be shown daily, and at the last minute, he communicated with his leaders about what he had not achieved.

"If I talk about the clarity, then yes, instructions were mostly clear. We used to get the assignments or tasks on the Teams dashboard or sometimes on email, and based on those assignments we had to execute the tasks. For weekly maintenance activities we had to prepare proper MOPs and SOPs and get approval. Our team leader used to follow up on the tasks, and if I had any issues or confusion, then he used to have one-to-one calls with me to explain the proper direction. After completing the tasks, we had to provide weekly uptime reports to the customer, and then the team used to calculate the SLA for the whole week and month" (Interviewee B).

"Yes, everything is clearly set. Before each week starts, we plan what tasks will be taken. We communicate with the team lead and business analyst and developers about how we will proceed. They prepare what tasks we can do, we discuss how we can do them in the coming week, and after that we commit the tasks. Daily we have standups where we discuss what we did yesterday, what we will do today, and if we face any blockers. At the end of the week we have a weekly standup where we discuss how the week went and how we can improve next week. So everything is clearly set" (Interviewee D).

“The clarity is clear. The outcome is always simple or straightforward. We always set which task we will do for the present day, and at the end of the day we discuss whether we were able to complete this task or not. Then we discussed what the problem was if we did not achieve it. Nothing is complex. It is totally clear” (interviewee C).

Interview A, found the flexibility in goal setting by his leaders because they are focusing on B2B marketing, which is task-based chiefly rather than traditional deadline-oriented. Because his leader expects quality work from the employees.

“Sometimes the goals are clear and sometimes not, because in B2B marketing things are not always deadline-driven like in software development. In my current team we are more focused on development and improvement rather than strict deadlines. Our manager sees how far we have progressed and then checks if we are improving. So the goals are clear but not always set with strict timelines. They observe work quality and progress over time rather than forcing deadlines” (Interviewee A).

Lastly, Interviewee E’s leader is different from the other; he uses Google sheets and spreadsheets to track his work progress and communicate with the goal settings accordingly.

“My leader always follows what I do every day. He checks everything through Google Sheets, Google Spreadsheet, or similar platforms, and he tracks my work through these platforms. That is what I can say” (Nafee).

Overall, the results suggest that goal setting is not only about communication clarity but about the consistent way a leader reacts and communicates with employees. Clear and on-time instructions, daily/weekly alignment meetings and structured documentation practices help hybrid employees manage tasks effectively.

On the other hand, poor communication, inconsistent availability and last-minute changes can impede productivity and cause frustration. Leadership behaviours in this domain directly affects the task execution, collaboration efficiency and employee confidence in hybrid MNCs environments.

4.5 Feedback and Support in Digital leadership

Feedback and support are the utmost priorities in MNCs where large-scale work processing is underway. The chain of command plays a key role in digital leadership in ensuring that employees receive timely feedback to improve performance. Digital leaders must establish a transparent and efficient communication structure to maintain productivity. This approach builds trust, enhances collaboration, and supports organizational goals in an interconnected environment.

Interviewee A, explained in detail how he receives feedback through informal communication, even during work, so that he can improve his tasks. He sometimes asks the leader to put him on an understaffed team so he can contribute to overall achievement. In this way, he supports his digital leaders and receives feedback from his leader. He found the system is flexible because the digital leader sometimes intervenes in the task to support him.

“In Germany, there is a strong culture of learning on the job. Often, a line manager ...how you organise your work. When doing a task for the first time, you can ask for feedback midway, for example: “I am doing it this way.....could you give me some constructive comments so I can improve?” Managers may respond ...you can improve or adjust. This helps them to... work independently with your line manager. For example, if you have capacity ...they may assign you to support that team....digital tools, this process has become much simpler. You can store your work in the cloud and share it with your managerasking for quick feedback, and they can review it ...You simply share the link, they review it

when they have time, and you can continue with other tasks meanwhile. ”

(Interview A)

Interview B said that whenever he faces an issue with his ongoing task, his leader organizes one-to-one calls and provides the necessary materials or pathways, which help him finish the task smoothly. Every week, his leader reviewed the work report and provided feedback by email, highlighting areas for improvement and expressing appreciation for completing the task on time.

“If I faced any issue or challenge with tools or tasks, our team leader used to have one-to-one calls with me. He also used to provide required documents or links which helped me understand things more clearly. Regarding feedback, after every week based on the report I submitted...they used to provide feedback by email or one-to-one calls. They would say: “You need to improve in this field,” or “There is scope for improvement.” Also, if I did anything good, he used to appreciate me. This is how it was going on.” (Interviewee B)

Interviewee C said that he usually does not need to go through the feedback procedure, but whenever he gets stuck on a task or faces issues, he asks the leader for help, and the leader shares key components to help him complete the task smoothly.

“Normally, we don’t follow much feedback through digital channels, but for communication we use Slack. Sometimes, if we face any issues in feature implementation, our leader shares the code, the requirement list, and everything through Slack. Since some credential things are confidential, they always share those things via Slack. We follow the instructions on Slack and work accordingly.” (Interviewee C)

Interview D explained that his leaders provided feedback in multiple ways, including a weekly review and a task-based feedback procedure, and on a biweekly basis through one-to-one meetings. Interestingly, his leader communicates about the task informally at cultural events. Interviewee E, also finds that feedback is an important factor in virtual work, as he believes positive reviews from digital leaders open new doors for him in his career.

“My leader provides feedback through multiple ways. One is the weekly sprint review, where we review our work....what we completed, what we missed, why we lagged behind. Apart from that, our team lead has one-to-one calls every two weeks or every month. We discuss our KPI, issues, improvements needed, and overall performance. She gives us feedback on how to improve for the next month. She also communicates informally sometimes for culture-building and informal meetings. (Fahim) (Interviewee D)

“Yes, that’s a very good question. Being a virtual assistant, freelancer, and remote worker, feedback is extremely important. Positive reviews can change our working career and take us to the next level.I have been working with multiple clients, and they are very good. They put positive reviews on my platforms like Upwork, Fiverr, and other freelancing platforms.These positive reviews give me more opportunities to work even better with other clients.” (Interviewee E)

“Usually I got help from others if I need any assist about it, softwares, for example, about teams, emails, some other settings. And because of this, this is a communication. I get this feedback or support, usually very fast, but I also got feedback about that some issues I should first try to manage myself.So, I get the help pretty fast, because we are using this digital channels to communicate.” (Maiju)

The findings reveal that effective feedback and support are critical parts of digital leadership in hybrid work environments. A common need for employees is to receive ongoing, constructive feedback, especially in performing new tasks to ensure that they are aligned with the expectations and to enhance the quality of a work. Digital tools like cloud storage and Microsoft Teams help leaders to provide timely input without disturbing the workflow, employees can share their drafts and get guidance online and keep working effectively.

Digital feedback systems allow for less traditional forms of pressure such as printing documents or waiting on in-person approval, a more flexible and responsive environment. Leaders who openly communicate, give supportive direction, and appreciate the efforts of employees help develop trust and build working relationships. This ongoing digital feedback loop is bringing increased performance, professional growth, and smooth coordination in a hybrid setting.

4.6 Drivers of Motivation and Productivity

Employees in hybrid and remote workplaces who work in tech-based multinational companies described a number of interconnected factors that affected the way they felt, how energetic they were, and how productive they were. These factors varied from the structural advantages of flexibility to the challenges posed by communication delays, difficulty of concentration, time zone differences, cultural differences, and emotional or psychological pressures. Their complete stories show how far-flung settings can both improve and impede performance based on leadership behaviour, understanding of the task and individual work conditions.

One of the most important motivators for many of the participants was the flexibility and autonomy that remote work allowed. Several employees stressed that removing long commutes and controlling their schedules more on their own made them more energetic and productive.

Interviewee A shared that he is motivated by the paid leave salary provided by the MNC. During the leaves, he travels a lot, and that reduces fatigue and burnout. However, workplace toxicity caused by colleagues' misbehavior sometimes makes him feel demotivated. Overall, he found his colleagues decent, which helps me, and the team is diverse.

“Basically like there's something called burnout... if you work for a longer period of time, like consistently, you will not feel motivated to keep working... your brain starts to take it off... It needs a break. In Germany they understand it... 20 days of yearly vacation... companies give 30 days... to keep myself motivated, I take vacation... keep myself away from work... When I return, I don't feel that fatigue, that burnout, and I can start working again. To work in an area that you like... understanding what you like and what you don't like... work in the area that you like. If you like your colleagues, if they're not toxic... keeping yourself motivated. If you don't like your colleagues or if somebody's toxic... they want to take you out... looking for your mistakes... you'll always feel demotivated... feel like crying before starting the day at work. Here I love it... my colleagues are really nice... I learn certain aspects that help me work with diverse teams... I don't feel demotivated except for the burnout.” (Interviewee A)

Interviewee B shared some mixed feelings. On the one hand, the flexibility of his work hours motivated him greatly. On the other hand, the home environment pulls him mentally in a different direction, sometimes taking away his focus and attention from his work. He found it hard to connect to his office PC via VPN, resulting in slower connectivity due to his unstable internet connection.

“I fist. As I mentioned earlier, for remote work, the positive side was that I used to get more time to perform my tasks. In the office, it was 9.00 AM to 5.00 PM, so everything had to be completed within that time. But at home, I could extend my

working hours; sometimes to 6 PM or 7 PM; so that was positive. On the negative side, there was a concentration problem due to the home environment. At home, you do not get the office environment, that's for sure. Also, sometimes Internet connectivity was an issue. If the Internet was not stable, it was difficult because I had to use VPN most of the time. Executing tasks through VPN becomes very hard with an unstable Internet. So that was one issue I faced.” (Tanuraj) (Interviewee B)

Interviewee D is working in a senior position and is closely related to a digital leader. He shared that his work roles motivated him greatly; he usually maintains the overall office connectivity features and tools to improve daily tasks. His point of view is that he is motivated by the impact his work has on the whole organization.

“The main motivating factor is improving our team’s effectiveness. As a senior software engineer, I have more responsibility. What motivates me is when our features and tools are used by the whole company and they say it improves their daily tasks. We work in a product-based company. Our tools are important, especially in stock management. We digitalized manual processes that made our workflow more efficient. So it motivates me that our work impacts users and makes their work easier.” (Interviewee D)

Lastly, Interviewee C shared his difficulty staying motivated, Interviewee F shared her flexibility in choosing her work hours, and Interviewee E shared his motivation with his company client's positive feedback and clear instructions. Like Interviewee B, Interviewee C also found his home environment less comfortable than his office environment. However, he does not need much communication with his leaders. On the other hand, Interviewee F expects her work output to have a significant impact on the company's growth, and this impact will be clearly visible to a digital leader.

“It's really hard to stay motivated every time when you work remotely, because there are so many outside factors, outside problems, and the environment is not

always for work. But we always try to stay motivated. That’s why I choose tasks that don’t need much communication or follow-up tasks where I already got all the information. So, I do those tasks myself. Since my work is hybrid, not fully remote or fully physical, I always choose the tasks that are easier to complete remotely.” (Interviewee C)

“This remotely working, it is kind of full freedom. We can choose our working spaces. And working time also is not so strict, because we have to write down ourselves these working times and. Like that. And then I think the positive thing is, like, we have great wishes and hope that this company will grow and we will get other clients and other projects, so then there will be more work in the future.” (Interviewee F)

“What motivates me is when clients give clear instructions and positive feedback. When everything is done easily and without confusion, it motivates me more” (Interviewee E).

Overall, the findings indicate that motivation and productivity in hybrid work environments are the outcome of an interaction between structural, individual, relational and contextual factors. The flexibility and autonomy provided by arrangements offered by hybrid working were major motivators as employees enjoyed the switch of being able to have control over their schedules, lowering the stress involved in commuting and having more options throughout the day to manage their energy.

Factors	Specific Evidence from Participants	Direction of Impact
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Flexibility & Autonomy	Control over working hours; reduced commute; ability to manage schedules (Interviewees A, B, F).	Strong Positive
Paid Leave & Burnout Prevention	Vacation allowance reduces burnout and increases renewed focus (Interviewee A).	Positive
Meaningful Work & Organisational Impact	Motivation increases when employees see their work improving company processes or client outcomes (Interviewees D, F, E).	Positive
Home Environment Challenges	Distractions, difficulty concentrating, outside pressures (Interviewees B, C).	Negative
Technical Barriers	VPN issues, unstable internet causing slower tasks (Interviewee B).	Negative
Communication Clarity	Clear instructions and positive feedback improve motivation (Interviewee E).	Positive
Workplace Behaviour / Team Culture	Toxic behaviour reduces motivation; supportive colleagues increase positivity (Interviewee A).	Mixed
Cultural & Language Differences	Misunderstandings due to accents or multicultural teams (Fahim).	Negative
Time-Zone Misalignment	Delayed decisions, interruptions to workflow (Fahim).	Negative

Table 4: Major Factors Affecting Motivation & Productivity in Hybrid Work

In conclusion, the motivation and productivity of employees in hybrid multinational environments is determined by the sum of factors such as flexibility, clarity of tasks, reliability of technology, relationships in the team and understanding of cultures as well as emotional well-being. Digital leadership plays a crucial role by offering clarity of communication, guidance, timely feedback, and a safe environment that supports employees in navigating the unique challenges of hybrid work.

4.7 Support in Communication and Technology Challenges

Throughout all of the interviews a consistent finding was that motivation did not drop when leadership behaviours supported clarity, responsiveness, and recognition. When leaders were able to communicate expectations, offer timely help to employees, or offer emotional support, employees felt more capable of managing hybrid complexities. On the other hand, the instances where communication gaps happened, time-zone delays, unclear instructions etc. the motivation often declined and productivity suffered.

Interviewee A, usually faces the challenges of Overcapacity. He is given tasks beyond his expectations and capabilities, and sometimes his leader informs and assists him, so that the leader can alert her when there is too much work pressure. His leader usually put other employees to assist him. When facing any issues or tasks that have not been done correctly, the leader requests that he work properly.

“Challenges usually appear when I work over capacity. If I have too many tasks to finish within the 40-hour work week, it becomes difficult to manage. Earlier,...I realised I was working beyond my capacity. I consider myself an agile person who can finish many tasks properly, but when my line manager.... she told me that whenever I had too many things on my plate, I should inform her. She said she would find others to support me because it would be too much for one person.my leader helped me overcome these challenges. Building trust with a team lead is very important...I try my best to follow the feedback. When you build trust, your boss becomes more openshe directly tells you: “Please do it like this next time.” My responsibility is to remember that feedback and continuously deliver according to their expectations..” (Interviewee A)

Interviewee B often faces technological obstacles he cannot solve, and then he communicates with his leader, who usually assigns someone familiar with such tasks to handle them. Interview D struggles to understand the native speakers' languages (especially his teammates), so the leader helps him communicate with the teammates or other teams on his behalf. Interviewee E is also satisfied with his leader, who usually helps him overcome technological challenges by providing clear instructions in a vocal or image format whenever and wherever needed.

Yeah, I mean, there was a clear escalation matrix. I was a level-2 engineer. If there was any issue I could not understand or solve, then the team leader assigned someone more experienced or familiar with the tasks. It was not like tasks were given and you had to complete them alone. Help was always available. If there was any network issue, we had the contact numbers of vendors, so we could communicate with them as well. Also, since we worked as a team, if anyone got sick or had personal work, others took responsibility. So it was easy to maintain. (Interviewee B)

Yes. As I mentioned, we are not native speakers of their language. Sometimes other teams don't speak English well. So our team leader communicates on our behalf. Regarding technical issues, since we have multiple engineering teams, we need to agree on tech stack and technologies. By doing this, she helps us overcome communication gaps and technological differences. (Interviewee D)

"My boss always helps me. If I face any problem, he tries to give me clear instructions by sending screenshots, voice messages, or sometimes recorded videos. (Interview E)

Across all interviews it became apparent that digital leaders play a crucial role in lowering the barriers of communication, as well as assisting employees in overcoming technological difficulties when working in hybrid situations. The timely guidance offered by leaders and the

redistribution of workload create expectations among employees that they feel supported and more stable while doing their job and that employees feel supported and more able to do their jobs well.

The interviews revealed that the employees are highly dependent on the responsiveness, clarity and problem-solving skills of their leaders - especially when tasks get overwhelming, when language differences lead to misunderstandings or when technical issues are beyond an individual's expertise.

Overall, the results put into perspective the fact that strong digital leadership - in terms of actively supporting, building trust and communicating effectively - plays a significant role in reducing hybrid work challenges and helping employees sustain both motivation and performance. When leaders look after the ongoing complexities of employees appropriately, the employees feel comfort during remote collaboration.

4.8 Barriers in Hybrid Work

Employers in MNCs operating in a hybrid environment face challenges that affect communication, coordination, clarity, and emotional well-being. Throughout the interviews, employees described the significant challenges they faced due to time-zone differences and cultural and language barriers. These barriers often slow down productivity, confuse them at work, and increase stress; therefore, Digital leaders need to collaborate with their employees to overcome these challenges effectively.

Interviewee A, shared several time barriers he faced while working for an MNC. Firstly, he faced time zone barriers while working with US teams because there is a significant difference between Central European Time and US Standard Time. Then, the cultural barrier was also a factor, as his colleague was from Croatia; they differ from Germans in how they talk and make decisions. Lastly, he faced a strict corporate culture requiring a reply to a colleague's or client's email within 24 hours.

“It does sometimes. So for example,..a team from the US. So their day starts, I think right now at 2:00 PM German time, like Central European time. So maybe you want to set up a meeting at 10, so it's like 4. So 4. PM in Central European Time Standard and. So the work will not flow properly and then things take longer to complete. So that's one of the first challenges...behave with a Croatian colleague in a different way compared to a German colleague. Because they're from a different cultural background. Second is there is also company culture...if somebody sends you an e-mail, either your colleague or your client, you have to reply to that e-mail within a 24 hours period.(Interview A)

Likewise, Interviewee B often faced communication barriers at work, where colleagues from South Asian regions often used their own languages. Due to such issues, he sometimes did not understand the instructions properly. Moreover, Interviewee C also faces a time zone barrier similar to Interviewee A, because his digital leader is in the USA. It is quite difficult for him to match times and receive feedback, and sometimes he spends so much time waiting that he has to wait the whole day to receive a response from his leader.

“The time zone was not an issue because we were serving customers in the same country. Regarding cultural variation, there were people from India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan; so it was a multinational company. Sometimes in meetings, some spoke in Bengali, others in Hindi. Some private discussions were done in local languages, but it was not a big issue. Eventually, we became familiar with the environment. However, one thing I must mention: the data center technical team (for cabling, mounting devices, etc.). We had to instruct them very clearly to complete tasks. Sometimes they could not follow the instructions properly due to communication issues. So yes, there were some challenges.” (Interviewee B)

“Yeah, sometimes. Because when you work in a different time zone, you don’t know if the person is available or not. It’s really hard to communicate. For example, my CTO and CEO are in the USA. The time zone is different. I sometimes have to wait a whole day for a single query, because when I work, they are sleeping; when they work, I’m sleeping. So it’s really hard sometimes in those cases.” (Interviewee C)

Lastly, Interviewee D also shared the story of a time difference that hampers his work progress in critical moments due to the time variation between Bangladesh and Europe, which leads to slower decision-making. Similarly, Interviewee E struggled with the 8-10 hour time difference, but after some time, he managed the issue and adapted to it.

Yes, sometimes quick decisions are delayed due to time-zone and cultural differences. If we are working on a feature and need decisions from another team, it takes time, and this blocks our work. Sometimes misunderstandings happen, but we communicate through the team lead to fix them. The major issue is slow decision-making because of remote and time-zone differences. For example, our colleagues from Lithuania may not be online when we need them; sometimes when we need something urgently, they are sleeping. (Interviewee D)

“Right now, it doesn’t. But when I first started working, there was an 8–10 hour difference between the US and Bangladesh. Now I am used to it, and it’s even easier for me to work in US time or any other country’s time.” (Interviewee E)

Across interviews, barriers experienced by employees while working in hybrid work environments can be categorized into two categories:

Barrier Category	Description	Observed Impact on Employees
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Time-Zone Barriers	<p>The time difference creates bottlenecks in the work progress due to some urgent decisions and instructions come according to the availability of colleagues rather than according to urgency or workload. Remote employees face the situation that their team members are not always available when issues arise, and the tasks need to be done within a specific timeframe. Such issues with the time differences lead to interruption of continuous workflows. Similar delays were experienced by another interviewee from South Asia while working with European teams.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Slow decision-making ❖ Interruption of Continuous Workflows ❖ Delayed Responses ❖ Tasks Take Longer to Complete, Waiting Whole Day for a Single Query ❖ Work Progress Blocked ❖ Difficult to Communicate ❖ Slower Decision-Making.
Cultural and Linguistic Barriers	<p>Employees found that working within various cross-culture environments needs some patience and a willingness to clarify the meanings to avoid misinterpretations. Some misunderstanding issues impacted employees to understand the given task and had to be fixed through additional explanations or repeating of the communication to clearly explain the given task. Another major barrier in hybrid international teams also occurred in cultural and language-related issues. Those problems concerned the interpretation, the clarity of communication, and understanding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Misinterpretations ❖ Misunderstanding Issues ❖ Difficulty to Understand the Given Task ❖ Clarity of Communication Affected ❖ Communication Issues ❖ Slower Decision-Making ❖ Confusion at Work ❖ Emotional Stress.

Table 5: Barriers in Hybrid Work Environments

These results summarize that the hybrid work-related issues are not only technical but also deeply connected to emotional factors. Digital leadership thus needs to raise awareness of global diversity, active communication, and emotional intelligence so that employees

working from different zones in hybrid environments can feel supported, motivated, and understood by their leaders and colleagues.

4.9 Recommendations for Digital Leaders

During the interviews, participants provided recommendations on the qualities digital leaders must possess to manage teams effectively in hybrid and multinational environments. They focus more on the importance of clear communication and transparency. Employees from different cultural backgrounds should have emotional intelligence and organize digital interactions. These suggestions come directly from their own experiences and need to be implemented in digital workplaces.

Interviewee A recommended that the digital leaders arrange a meeting every six months to review what has been done as planned and what is not going well and needs improvement. The meeting should be arranged among the leader, clients, and employees. In the meeting, the client may provide feedback to the digital leaders, project workers, and managers on what is keeping them from progressing on the ongoing projects. He also adds that such a half-yearly meeting with clients and digital leaders will build trust between them, providing transparency.

“Most of the work we do is project-based. What I see missing is a structured feedback process. ...the client, and the leaders should set up a meeting every six months to discuss what can be improved, what was not done well enough, and what should be done more. The client can give their feedback, and the project workers and project managers can also explain..hindranceBoth sides can then agree on how to better support each other. ..digitally, this kind of regular feedback loop would help build trust between the team and the client. With consistent six-month check-ins, the trust becomes strong enough that the client may not feel like leaving the collaboration. (Interviewee A)

Interviewee B recommends that digital leaders provide clear instructions and emphasize the importance of quick feedback. He thinks that timely feedback is most important in hybrid work. In an MNC, it is tough to go further with ongoing mistakes or without proper feedback. He stresses the importance of encouragement and appreciation from the digital leaders who make him feel motivated. Lastly, he points out that each task should be appropriately documented on a convenient platform or in the cloud, so leaders can track task progress, approve pending tasks for finalization, and identify areas for improvement.

“The best suggestion I can give is that communication is the most important thing. A leader has to give instructions to subordinates more clearly and with proper clarification... and leaders must also understand the situation; ..of a separate room at home. These are challenges a leader should consider. Leaders should provide quick feedback. At hybrid setup, it is difficult, so timely feedback becomes more important... Proper documentation is also needed.... So preparing documents and getting approval from the team leader before performing tasks is important. (Interviewee B).

Interviewee F recommends that a digital leader should understand their employees' IT skills. Based on the skillset, the task might be divided and assisted accordingly. She also stresses that the leader should foster cohesion among team efforts, especially during live events and workshops.

“Characteristics, which is effective for digital leaders in a hybrid MNC environment, improvements, suggestions, I think this is important to understand individual IT skills... I might need some more help with its challenges than others. So I think it would build and develop our cohesion in our team if we have more of these kinds of live meetings, and it would be good to have... some kind of

workshopsit would be good to have another woman in our team, because I am the only one, and also the person who could support me more so we could build very good aids in this company.” (Interviewee F)

Interviewee G recommends that the digital leaders balance workloads among all employees. Moreover, stressed the importance of clear communication; when communication is unclear, the final objective is often unclear to employees. Interviewee E recommends that, as a digital leader, someone should be fast and accurate to provide MNC services to the B2B customer to a satisfactory level and stresses more on time sensitivity, which helps to bring punctuality and service delivery to the customer, and a lack of such quality may downgrade digital leaders from their position and even affect the company image itself might effect.

So, the main thing I want to focus on is ensuring balanced workloads. In this kind of work session, it becomes harder to maintain that balance. These are the main challenges we’re facing. Another issue is communication. We need to communicate more clearly, because sometimes the message doesn’t come across as well as it would in face-to-face conversations.” (Interviewee G)

“I think that to be a digital leader, a person needs to be on top of everything, precise in what he is doing, fast and accurate, so the customer becomes satisfied. Everything needs to be accurate and on time, because in remote or virtual positions, time-sincerity is very important. The person needs to be punctual, accurate, and deliver work with full dedication. Anything opposite to this is negative and can downgrade a person’s performance. So he needs to work with his full heart. (Interviewee E)

Interviewee C recommends that the digital leaders' communication should be clear because he often faced some challenges to understand the English accent from his Finnish native leader. As a leader, this barrier must be overcome by providing clarity in guiding his own employees.

Similarly, Interview D also stresses the Leader's clarity in communication and transparency in decision-making. He focuses on a point of Autonomy, which means decentralization, that a leader should allow their employees to make some decisions on their own. Moreover, leaders should provide opportunities for employees to develop their capabilities and learn different technology stacks. He focuses more on employee independence in decision-making and on organizing events, such as education day, once a month, so that employees can easily learn new things from leaders and teammates.

“One of my colleagues, Johanna, he’s our iOS lead, I always talk about his leadership qualities. His communication is clear. If I don’t understand something, sometimes because of the Finnish pronunciation of English words, he helps me decode the language. He always communicates through Slack. I always recommend him as a leader because he is so clear, he tries to understand the problem, he tries to understand the situation, and then he shares his knowledge. So yes, this is what I recommend. (Interviewee C)

“Yes. I think digital leaders should communicate clearly, maintain transparency in decisions, and provide regular feedback to their employees. They should encourage autonomy to allow engineers to make some decisions on their own.also be considerate when scheduling meetings,... time zone gaps, and avoid arranging meetings in the last hours. Leaders should help improve engineering capabilities and give opportunities to learn different stacks or technologies. Leaders should also help team members grow in the company. Sometimes team members need to think independently; leaders should encourage that and then

validate their solutions. They can also create an “education day” once a month so team members can learn new things. (Interviewee D)

Overall, the recommendations reflect that successful digital leadership involves more than managing tasks and is highly dependent on personal communication, awareness of cultural differences, and psychological support. Employees expect that the digital leaders should manage hybrid complexities effectively with compassion and clarity. These characteristics not only impact the results of tasks, but they are also the symbol of the overall effectiveness and well-being of teams that work in various geographical and cultural settings.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion of the findings

This study's findings provide important insights on the impact of digital leadership on employee performance in hybrid work environments in technology-based MNCs. By comparing the findings from Chapter 4 to the theoretical perspectives from Chapter 2 the results can be placed more clearly in the context of existing research about digital leadership, remote work dynamics, and global team performance.

Employers were regularly focused on the vital role digital communication tools such as Teams, Slack, Zoom, and Jira played in organizing the day-to-day operations and maintaining collaboration. Avolio et al., (2014) suggested in his research that digital communication platforms are the fundamental infrastructure of modern leadership practices.

However, the results demonstrate that the proper usage of tools not only increases their availability but also the leadership capability to communicate clearly and respond on time and maintain cultural differences. This provides further support to Eisenberg et al. (2020), who stressed on clarity and responsiveness as necessary skills in virtual leadership, but this time the current study further continues that these behaviors become even more important in technologically intensive MNCs where the employees often work using asynchronous workflows.

Participants highlighted supportive leadership behaviours - such as guidance in performing complex tasks, understanding emotions, being a good listener, and balancing workload - as important for boosting motivation and task performance. This is consistent with Wang et al. (2021) that found that human-centred leadership helps to improve engagement in remote teams. Yet the findings here add to this further by highlighting the influence of cultural sensitivity and linguistic adaptability on the perceptions of support by employees in the

multinational context of which resonates with the work by Hoch & Kozlowski (2014) on global virtual teams, but with greater empirical backing specific to the hybrid MNC context.

The research also found significant negative leadership behaviours, such as a lack of clear expectations, availability and emotionally distant digital interactions. While we went through a lot of research before, now that proves virtual environments may be amplifying the effect of leadership weaknesses (Purvanova & Bono, 2009), this work shows that breakdowns in clarity or responsiveness can have a disproportionate effect when employees work across time zones and rely so heavily on digital coordination. Goal clarity and planned digital structures are positive drivers of performance. Participants shared their delighting feelings that their leaders organized weekly meetings and used task dashboards and clear documentation that made themselves confident and productive.

Findings by Locke & Latham (2019) who suggested that goal-specificity makes it easier to perform better. The findings point to the fact that in the hybrid MNC context, digital structure is not only administrative but also comes to be foundational to employee autonomy and stability of performance.

Immediate feedback of digital leaders has a great impact on employees, higher motivational levels and less uncertainty. This finding is consistent with those made in the research of Baker et al. (2019), in which the authors argued that feedback is a determinant of performance in hybrid teams. However, the results here add new knowledge by showing how realtime feedback processes, like annotated documents, voice notes or screen sharing act as mental support bridging the gap for lack of physical closeness.

The study also confirms the research on the challenges of hybrid works already conducted (Gibbs et al., 2021), such as time zone delays, cultural misalignment, technical interruptions, and virtual isolation. The insights show how leaders act as mediators of such challenges through their qualities such as flexible scheduling, cultural decoding and quick problem-solving. The present findings outline how leadership actions can help to overcome these barriers and boost performance outcomes.

The overall findings and discussion are summarized in the flowchart presented below:

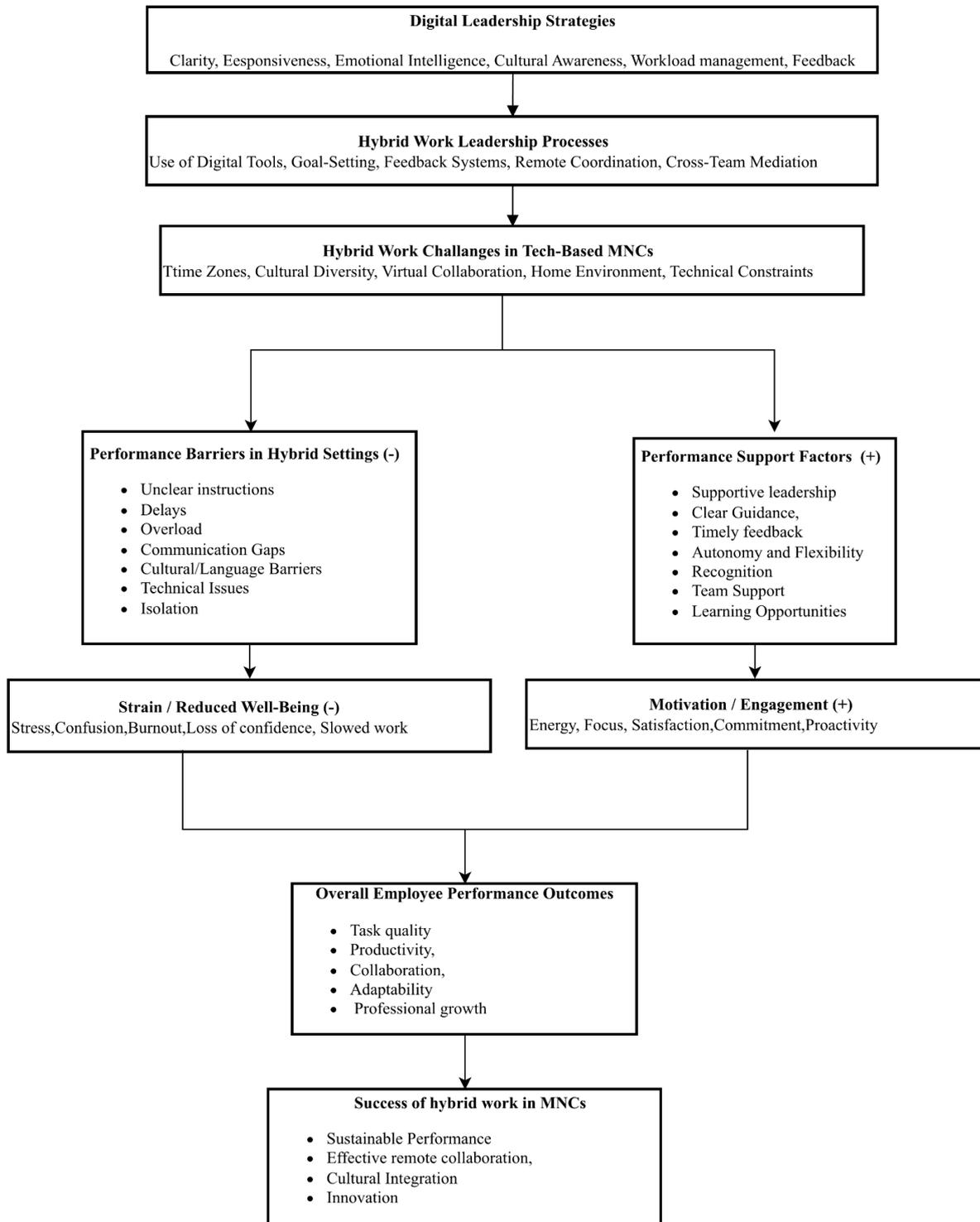


Figure 4: Updated Theoretical Framework

Finally, recommendations by employees outline that the digital leaders in the MNC context should own a human-centered, cultural, and communicative-oriented digital leadership approach. These insights reveal that leadership models are moving away from being solely technologically based and moving towards more integrated models that include emotional intelligence, digital well-being, and global coordination. This is connected with the developing approach in digital leadership research, which is focusing more on holistic and adaptive competencies (Cortellazzo et al., 2019).

The findings not only confirm the existing literature but also focus on a deeper understanding of theories by illustrating the integration of clarity, emotional support, cultural understanding, and communication, as these have an impact on employee performance in globally distributed and technologically advanced workplaces.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study includes major theoretical contributions to the literature on digital leadership, hybrid work conditions, and employee performance in technology-based MNCs. Some of the current research has explored the topic of hybrid work and digital transformation. The current research focuses on theory by connecting the real-life experiences of employees and explaining how digital leadership behaviours influence performance outcomes under the various scenarios of hybrid workplaces.

First, the study contributes to digital leadership theory by showing that effective digital leadership is more than just being technologically competent and includes a multi-dimensional combination of clarity, responsiveness, emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, workload management and consistent feedback.

Second, the study adds to hybrid work theory by pinpointing the distinct nature of Hybrid Work Challenges as time-zone differences, cultural diversity, the need for virtual

collaboration, technical limitations, and disruptions in the home environment, which lead to a unique set of strain factors that are not happened during traditional jobs. The data indicate that these challenges are not operational issues and they affect the emotional states of employees, their clarity, and their engagement. The findings show that digital leadership drivers are not just stress reducers but can create long term positive performance that encourages proactive behaviour. This two-fold relationship, strain vs motivation, contributes to the completeness of theoretical frameworks by demonstrating that digital leadership affects performance by decreasing negative conditions and increasing positive conditions.

Third, the research is relevant to the field of cross-cultural leadership because it explains how digital leaders operate in the complexities of global teams that are marked by significant linguistic differences, cultural norms, and communication styles. The experiences of the employees show that cultural difference, interpretation of accents and variety of communication norms are key competencies in digital leadership. This adds a new layer in digital leadership theories as it demonstrates that the hybrid environments cause cultural challenges to increase and that new ways of communicating that have not been studied enough.

Finally, an empirically grounded Updated Theoretical Framework is developed which integrates digital leadership strategies, leadership processes, hybrid work challenges, performance barriers, performance support factors and ultimate performance outcomes. This framework contributes to the understanding by depicting the way leadership behaviours are cascaded across hybrid work systems to have an impact on both well-being and performance. By bridging the employee's experiences and leadership theory, the model provides a holistic explanation of mechanisms where digital leadership affects performance in global hybrid organisations. It offers a conceptual tool that can be tested and used in future comparative research across different industries.

The study enhances theoretical frameworks with the finding that digital leadership in hybrid MNC environments is diverse, culturally specific, psychologically influential and highly dependent on the efficacy of digital communication. The contributions add to the theory of leadership and hybrid work by underpinning existing theory in the real-life experiences of employees and offering a coherent framework for evaluating the impact of current, digitally mediated work environments on performance.

5.3 Practical Implications

The study revealed the dual scenario of hybrid work. On the positive side, flexibility, autonomy, and less commuting time led to more energetic and productive employees. Moreover, on the negative side, communication delays, technical disruptions, challenges in understanding language accents, and virtual isolation resulted in pressure and sometimes delays in work. In some cases, the absence of digital leaders and a lack of handling such issue-solving capabilities make the hybrid work more challenging. The suggested new theoretical framework combines both parts because it shows how digital leadership tactics and support systems directly affect performance results by changing hybrid work processes and contextual barriers.

The results of this study have important implications for the managers and organizational leaders of technology-based international corporations. Digital leadership is now essential to keep employees healthy and productive, as hybrid work is becoming the norm for businesses worldwide. The results indicate that there are areas where leadership practices and organizational rules can be improved to better support employees who work from home.

One of the key effects that remains unclear in digital communication. Employees also said that they often had problems because instructions weren't clear, expectations weren't specific, or responses were late using digital methods. These problems slowed things down and made things uncertain. Leaders can help correct this by ensuring their teams have clear written rules and using the same words over and over again throughout the teams. After the virtual meetings, repeating the main tasks and using common documentation platforms can

also help avoid misunderstandings. Because MNC teams are made up of people from many different cultures, leaders need to be especially careful to be clear when they talk to people from different cultures and languages.

Another implication is that of the importance of immediate and constructive feedback. The results of the study demonstrate that employees rely heavily on digital feedback tools to ensure they are on the same page with their development and verify that they are doing their jobs properly. Regular check-ins, digital annotation tools, and regular performance feedback can all help employees without waiting for a face-to-face meeting. Companies can make this even better by employing digital dashboards, in which their employees and leaders can see how tasks and performance indicators are performing in real time.

The study also indicates that the hybrid environment requires workload balancing by distributing equal work to all employees. Because of the nature of digital work, it can be difficult for managers to accurately assess employee workload at a given time; as a result, they may assign more tasks than employees can reasonably manage. That is one of the things that causes employees to get stressed, burnt out, and perform worse. Digital leaders can mitigate these risks by using tools to monitor workloads and by having themselves look at capacity before assigning additional tasks. Some educational events organized by the digital leader on a semi-annual basis may help employees identify digital boredom and emotional stress, and the techniques of facing and fixing them.

Cultural diversity is another important factor in hybrid work, as it helps connect diverse cultural backgrounds under one umbrella and helps employees understand each other's differences, communication norms, and language accents. Employees reported difficulties with accent differences, norms of communication, and culturally based expectations. Organisations can respond by ensuring they provide cross-cultural communication training, encourage leaders to use simple and inclusive language and create a friendly environment. This could help global teams in working in a better way and enhance understandability.

Access to technical support is one common scenario. Participants often faced problems that were associated with the stable internet and VPN connectivity, and tool specific issues. These issues slowed progress and created barriers to performance. Technology-based MNCs can enhance the hybrid work experience by investing in solid remote work infrastructure, providing them with regular training on the use of technology, and ensuring that they provide faster IT support to the scattered employees. Leaders should also be equipped to navigate through digital challenges when needed for employees, for example, screen sharing or guiding solutions step-by-step.

The implications are further reaching in the areas of organizational policy and leadership development. Many of the leadership behaviours that employees valued such as emotional intelligence, responsiveness, structured communication and awareness of workloads, can be strengthened through targeted training programmes. Organizations may update their hybrid work policies to reflect expectations of availability, digital communication standard, time sensitive meeting practices, and documentation protocol. Supporting leaders with professional development programs is one way of ensuring that digital leadership is viewed as a specialized competency instead of an extension of traditional managerial roles.

The findings show that employees work better when they feel there is a balance between autonomy and support. Hybrid work allows employees greater control over their schedules than they do, but they are depending on leadership for clarity, direction, and guidance. Leaders who show trust, acknowledge contributions and offer learning opportunities help provide an environment where employees feel they can take initiative and maintain consistent performance.

In general, the practical consequences of this study demonstrate that better digital leadership can prove highly productive in making hybrid work arrangements much more productive. Organizations may make hybrid teams that are strong, motivated, and high-performing all across the world, by improving communication, feedback, awareness of workload, sensitivity to cultural differences, technical support, and team cohesion.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This qualitative study provides a rich insight into digital leadership in hybrid technology-based MNCs, however there are a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged. The research is based on a small and specific context sample, which matches qualitative depth but reduces the transferability of the results to other industries or organizational forms. Due to the self-reports of the participants, the data reflect the subjective interpretations, which can be affected by personal experiences, emotions and retrospective sense-making, which is an inherent feature of interview based research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study was also conducted within one broad sector that of technology-based multinational companies which may have a higher level of digital maturity than other organizational sectors, and different norms related to hybrid work. As such, these findings should be interpreted as those that are representative of the context studied as opposed to being universally applicable. Furthermore, the research captures a single moment in time; hybrid work practices, leadership behaviours and digital systems evolve rapidly, meaning the results are unable to capture long-term shifts and emerging trends. Finally, while the study puts forward an updated theoretical framework, qualitative frameworks are mostly interpretive frameworks rather than generalisable frameworks and the study should therefore be considered conceptual rather than predictive (Saldana, 2021).

The study is centered on qualitative, semi-structured interviews, which enable the possibilities of deep exploration of employees personal experiences, but at the same time there are a number of methodological limitations that should be acknowledged. Because qualitative sampling emphasizes depth over breadth, the purpose of qualitative sampling was to keep the numbers small and the objective was that the findings would be the perspectives of the particular employees interviewed due to the lack of goal of broad generalizability across all technology-based MNCs (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The data are also based on subjective narratives from the participants, which may be affected by personal interpretation, emotional state, memory recall, or willingness to disclose sensitive information - factors inherent in conducting research based on interviews (Tracy, 2020). As

the interviews were conducted at one point in time, the study captures the experiences of employees at that one point in time and cannot reflect how their perception or their hybrid work conditions may change. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are dependent on what participants choose to share, so certain experiences or challenges might not be spoken about that are relevant to the topic. The research situation itself also constitutes a limitation: all participants were employed in technology-oriented multinational companies, which are classified as a sector with a high digital maturity and already set up remote-work infrastructure. As a result, the findings may not fully translate to industries with different cultural expectations and technological capabilities or organizational structures. Finally, while the study provides an updated conceptual framework, such frameworks in qualitative research are interpretive models based on the narratives of the participants rather than predictive models which can be applied to everyone in a universal way (Saldana, 2021)

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

Section 1: Background and Experience

1. Could you please tell me your current position, job responsibilities and experience in this company?
2. How would you describe your team structure?
3. How would you describe your overall work environment in this MNC (Multi-National Company)?

Section 2: Research-Specific Questions (Digital Leadership & Employee Performance)

Digital Leadership Practices

4. How does your leader use digital communication tools? (e.g., Teams, Zoom, Slack)?
5. What are the leadership behaviors that have positively influenced your work performance in hybrid settings?
6. Are there any digital leadership behaviors that impacted or negatively affected your work experience? If yes, how?
7. How clearly does your leader set goals and communicate about the outcomes during hybrid work settings?
8. How effectively does your leader provide feedback, guidance, or support through digital channels?

Employee Performance & Hybrid Work Dynamics

9. What are the factors that make it easier or harder for you to stay motivated and productive while working remotely?
10. How does your leader assist you in overcoming challenges such as communication gaps and technology problems?
11. Do the hybrid work situations (e.g., time zones, cultural differences, virtual collaboration) create challenges to your performance?

Section 3: Open Discussion and Closing Reflections

12. Would you like to recommend any characteristics that are effective for digital leaders in a hybrid MNC environment, and what improvements would you suggest?