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# **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN HYBRID WORK: IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY**



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## **Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation**

### **Declaration Form.**

I, Amir Homayounfard declare that this dissertation has been composed by myself, that the work contained herein is entirely my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification, in whole or in part, except as specified.

**Signature: LABHU RANMALBHAI MODHWADIYA**

**Date: 8/06/2026**

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I am grateful to my peers who offered their valuable feedbacks, thereby aiding me to shape and develop this research paper successfully. In addition to this, I would like to thank my family and friends for their constant support throughout this research.

Thank You

## **Abstract**

Today, transformational leadership has a point of power to solve hybrid work issues. Transformational leadership occurs when leaders inspire employees with a strong sense of vision, intellectual stimulation, and personalised attention which helps them perform out of their heads. Microsoft has been chosen as the case study because of its well-documented hybrid work practices and leadership strategies. This research aims to explore the effect of transformational leadership on employee engagement and productivity in hybrid work environments in Microsoft and to determine under which organisational circumstances the relationships are likely to be stronger or weaker. This research uses interpretivist philosophy, descriptive design, deductive approach, and secondary data collection. Thematic analysis has been used to critically analyse the collected data. The results indicate that Microsoft sees hybrid working as one way of operating which is facilitated through trust, structure, and digital means. Additionally, the research points to the importance of engagement and productivity in relation to three factors: leadership, quality of communication, and belonging.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale**

### **1.1 Research Background**

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an incredible shift of the global workplace that has adopted hybrid work models where remote work and in office work are combined. Technology, professional services, financial, and other knowledge intensive organisations have embedded hybrid work as long-term model of operation. Recent statistics show that 84 % of organisations currently provide hybrid (and 76 % of workers choose hybrid working compared to full remote or full office work platforms) (Second Talent, 2025). This trend is a strategic repositioning of flexible, employee demands, and business survival in a competitive talent economy. Nevertheless, hybridisation has created managerial issues, especially, in maintaining engagement, collaboration, and productivity, previously supported by co-location and informal relationship.

Digital transformation, global talent mobility and lightning-fast technological innovation are the fierce competitive pressures that knowledge-based organisations face. Companies are becoming more and more dependent on online teamwork tools, cloud computing, and AI to organize remote teams and ensure productivity. According to McKinsey & Company (2025), hybrid models demand leadership practices that do not destroy culture and performance of the organisation but use tech without sacrificing the aspect of human connection. At the same time, organisations have to perceive regulatory challenges, such as workplace legislation on remote work, data privacy, workplace safety, and cross-jurisdictional employment that can determine the implementation of hybrids (deloitte.com, 2023). It seems that 63 % of executives note that it is hard to keep culture in a hybrid setting and these are the issues of managing a dispersed workforce (Careertrainer.ai, 2024). These are some of the reasons why leadership practices are an essential strategic element towards the maintenance of a strong performance and competitive edge.

In this framework, transformational leadership has become a more highlighted point of power to solve hybrid work issues. Transformational leadership is when leaders inspire employees with a strong sense of vision, intellectual stimulation, and personalised attention which helps them perform out of their heads (Gonfa, 2019). The style of

leadership fits particularly well in hybrid environments where workers usually operate independently and have minimal direct oversight. Studies show that transformational leaders have the ability to affect the organisational performance in terms of employee engagement, innovation and job productivity; transformational leader may have approximately 32 % higher employee engagement rate, which reflects the impact of leadership behaviour on organisational performance (IJRISS, 2025). Moreover, the leadership style in which the importance of psychological safety and connectedness is stressed is proven to support engagement and performance within digitally mediated organisations (Harvard Business Impact, 2025). The relevance of the topic is also supported by larger workforce trends that global engagement is at a comparatively low level, as only 21 % of the employees are fully active at the workplace, which can undermine the productivity and organisational commitment (Gallup, 2025). Despite the fact that hybrid work usually positively impacts flexibility and work life balance, leaders remain uncertain about the team cohesiveness and performance in geographically spread environments. According to the surveys, 87 % of employees believe that they are productive in hybrid arrangements but organisations are still struggling to effectively manage performance (WifiTalents, 2026). Unless the leadership practices are adjusted to these realities, hybrid models may lead to communication gaps, lower informal interactions, and make teams weaker.

Although the research on hybrid work and leadership is becoming increasingly popular, the impact of transformational leadership on employee engagement and productivity in a hybrid setting is relatively under-investigated. This gap poses a requirement to learn the role of leadership in workforce outcomes in the distributed work settings. Thus, the research question includes the effect of transformational leadership on workforce engagement and output in workplace hybrids.

## **1.2 Research Rationale**

### **1.2.1 Theoretical Justification**

Transformational leadership is among the most established leadership theories in organisational research and its core in explaining the motivation, engagement and

performance of followers. The theory is based on the works of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) and asserts that the leaders can influence the employees by envisioning and eliciting new thinking, offering personalised support and motivation beyond temporary obedience. These concepts are most frequently described in the modern literature in terms of Job DemandsResources model, social exchange theory and self-determination theory that, jointly, imply that transformational leaders enhance engagement by enhancing autonomy, meaning, support and psychological resources. The empirical evidence helps to uphold this opinion: transformational leadership has been related to work engagement and frontline performance, where engagement is a major mechanism instead of a mere side effect (Buil et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2025).

What is less evident is the strength of these relationships in hybrid work environments, where leadership is practiced both online and partially in face-to-face interactions that may occur sporadically. According to the most recent evidence, remote working may undermine collaboration networks by making them more rigid and siloed, having fewer cross-group bridges and more asynchronous communication (Yang et al., 2022). Simultaneously, hybrid work is becoming the most popular form of flexible work and there is causal evidence that hybrid schedules can enhance job satisfaction, and lower the quit rates without harming measured performance (Bloom, Han and Liang, 2024). Nevertheless, recent reviews also point out that the literature remains disjointed, and there is no evidence regarding long-term effects, regional variations, digital skills as well as the context in which leadership is most vital in hybrid settings (Kim et al., 2025; Maity et al., 2025). This implies that the current theory is effective in explaining transformational leadership in traditional environments, but not fully how it functions when the employees are situated at home and the office.

The particular gap that will be filled in this dissertation is thus the comparative lack in evidence of how transformational leadership affects employee engagement and productivity in hybrid work environments and the organisational factors in which the effects become reinforced or diluted. Available literature is likely to address engagement or performance individually or consider remote work and not hybrid work as a specific environment. This limits the development of theory since it is not yet clear whether

transformational leadership primarily serves as motivational resource, coordination mechanism or substitute to co-location in distributed teams. Recent systematic reviews specifically suggest the need to conduct additional research specific to remote and hybrid setups and emphasize the concept of trust-building, emotional intelligence and digital competence as crucial yet under-theorised (Kim et al., 2025). Due to this fact, the dissertation constructs a much more context-sensitive definition of transformational leadership in the hybrid work instead of a universal effect.

### **1.2.2 Practical Justification**

The practical significance of the topic is great. According to Gallup, only 21% of workers around the world are engaged and disengagement cost the global economy estimated US\$438 billion in 2024 indicating that employee engagement is a significant productivity challenge as opposed to a soft HR consideration (Gallup, 2025). Simultaneously, McKinsey discovered that 87% of interviewees thought that they would be more productive working the number of days they prefer at home than working five days per week in the office, which proves that employees still appreciate flexibility and autonomy (McKinsey & Company, 2023). The 2026 Global Human Capital Trends survey by Deloitte also notes that seven out of ten business leaders regard being fast and nimble as their main competitive strategy, but only 7% believe they are at the head of the workforce change required to implement that strategy, which points to the discrepancy between strategic intent and managerial ability (Deloitte, 2026).

The question of whether hybrid work must exist is not the only problem to managers, but rather how to sustain it without negatively affecting collaboration, retention or performance. There is an indication that effectively controlled remote work may lead to more fragmented collaboration and less cross-team sharing of knowledge, whereas well-planned hybrid work may enhance job satisfaction and decrease turnover without declining performance (Yang *et al.*, 2022; Bloom, Han and Liang, 2024). That causes an opportunity cost on organisations unaware of what kind of leadership behaviours will be most important in hybrid environments: they can lose their engagement, undermine culture and complicate performance management, despite spending a lot of money on digital tools and flexible policies. The practical usefulness of the study is that it

determines the type of leadership that enables hybrid work to provide its promised benefits rather than work location change.

### **1.3 Research Contribution and Motivation**

The study is a contribution to the body of theory of transformational leadership by extending the literature to a hybrid-work setting, which is relatively underdeveloped. Although a great deal of research has been done on transformational leadership in the context of traditional settings, co-located settings, those environments where people spend part of their days at a physical space and part of their days at a virtual space, are also in need of a more conceptual revamping of the concept. It is based on the existing theoretical perspectives, such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, self-determination theory and social exchange theory, to explain the role of leadership behaviours in employee engagement and productivity in digitally mediated settings. In particular, it examines the role of transformational leadership in offering the essential psychological and relational resources, namely autonomy, trust, meaning and support, when direct supervision is minimized and communication is becoming more technology-reliant. Instead of merely validating the effectiveness of transformational leadership, the study tries to understand how and under what circumstances it can be applied in hybrid work. Thus, it adds to theory by elucidating the role of transformational leadership as a motivational resource, a relational stabiliser or a compensatory mechanism to lower co-location and informal interaction.

Moreover, it is a response to recent academic demands to pay more attention to such aspects as trust-building, emotional intelligence and digital competence in remote working conditions, thus narrowing the scope of the conditions of prevailing leadership theories (Kim et al., 2025). The empirical value of the study is that it adopts a multi-case comparative research design, which is based on secondary-data. This methodological framework is especially appropriate to study complex and context-specific organisational phenomena including hybrid work and leadership practice. According to Eisenhardt (1989), multiple-case studies facilitate within-case and cross-case analysis, which enables the researcher to determine patterns, similarities and differences between different organisational contexts. Equally, Yin (2018) reiterates that case study

research designs are particularly useful in answering questions of the type of how and why in real-life situations where variables cannot be easily separated or manipulated. Using several organisational cases, this paper captures the difference in digital maturity, leadership practices and hybrid-work implementation, thus, facilitating a more comprehensive and more in-depth insight into the functionality of transformational leadership in practice. This strategy goes past mere correlational results and helps in theory construction to determine contingencies and situational effects which determine leadership performance.

In practical terms, the research can be of use to managers and organisations struggling with the issues of hybrid work. With hybrid models being a continuing aspect of the contemporary organisations, leaders need to discover ways of ensuring the engagement, productivity and organisational culture of dispersed teams. The results of this study are expected to give evidence-based recommendations on the most effective leadership behaviours, communication strategies and support mechanisms in such settings. This can help the managers make better decisions when it comes to managing teams, performance and employee development. Furthermore, the paper identifies the possible dangers and opportunity cost of poor leadership in mixed environments, such as decreased engagement, poorer collaboration and decreased productivity. The novelty of the dissertation is in the combination of the interests in transformational leadership, employee engagement and productivity in a hybrid-work environment, and a comparative case-based approach. The study provides a unique and practically useful contribution to the field of study and practice by connecting theory and empirical evidence of organisations.

## **1.4 Research Aim, Objectives, and Questions**

### **Research Aim**

The aim of the research is to explore the effect of transformational leadership on employee engagement and productivity in hybrid work environments in Microsoft and to determine under which organisational circumstances the relationships are likely to be stronger or weaker.

## **Research Objectives**

- To investigate significant transformational leadership behaviours, which influence hybrid employees by taking Microsoft as a case example.
- To examine the role of transformational leadership in employee engagement in the hybrid work environment: a case study of Microsoft.

## **Research Question**

- What is the impact of transformational leadership on productivity on Microsoft's hybrid teams?

## **1.5 Dissertation Structure**

Chapter 2 includes an extensive overview of the available body of literature regarding transformational leadership and hybrid work, employee engagement, and productivity and determines the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 3 presents the research design, the argument supporting the choice of a secondary-data, multi-case comparative research design, and the description of the selection of cases, data sources and method of the analysis. Chapter 4 provides the empirical results in the form of the cross-case analysis, pointing out the major patterns and differences. Chapter 5 presents these findings as they relate to the literature, theoretical and managerial implications of the study, limitations of the study, and recommendations of future research directions.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The chapter reviews the existing academic literature on transformational leadership in hybrid workplaces, employee engagement, and productivity and presents that information to formulate the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that will be used to analyse the case in the next chapters. It is a chapter devoted to post-2020 peer-reviewed studies as after the pandemic the situation with the hybrid-work shifted drastically. Luring and Jonasson (2025) assert that hybrid work is not a single system, but a flexible form, which is defined by modality, place and time, and conceptual ambiguity has inhibited cumulative scholarship. This is a key component, in this instance because the dissertation is investigating how transformational leadership works as teams cut across digital and physical frontiers.

The literature reviewed in this paper is limited to the hybrid-work design, transformational leadership, staff engagement and productivity. Bigger leadership theories are addressed only in a case where they can help in elucidating the important mechanism or indicating a boundary state. The chapter is organised into four main sections. First, it makes the hybrid-work context and challenges it poses clear. Second, it considers the profile of the influence of transformational leadership on engagement and work performance in remote and hybrid work. Third, it evaluates the role of engagement, psychological safety, autonomy and digital communication as processes and circumstances which affect outcomes. Fourth, it identifies the theoretical prism which best fits the study and converts the review to a conceptual framework that will be utilized to analyse the case and undertake the cross-case discussion.

### **2.2. Thematic Overview of the Literature**

#### **2.2.1 Hybrid work as a contested and multidimensional context**

Hybrid work has also been increasingly theorised as a dynamic and morphing organisational structure, as opposed to a fixed and homogenous structure. Luring and Jonasson (2025) believe that hybrid work is a traveling trend rather than a policy because employees are traveling between digital and face-to-face formats, places, and synchronous or asynchronous time formats. Their conversation is not based on the

duality of offices and homes but highlights that hybrid space comes with special coordination demands as opposed to remote work. According to the study by Jaß *et al.* (2024) that is based on a qualitative study of the German public administration, the same results are also shown: hybrid work can positively affect the isolation and work-life balance, but such benefits are often predetermined by technical aspects, the culture of presence, and ambiguous organisational practices. Similarly, Stempel and Dettmers (2025) show that the work of supervisors is redefined by hybrid work that complicates the leadership role of such professionals and requires more digitally mediated coordination, making leadership practices more challenging to standardise.

Recent experience is converging on the opinion that hybrid work is appealing as it has the flexibility of working with the social value of being in the office, yet its effectiveness hinges on the design quality. On the basis of a systematic review of 78 studies, Nagori and Lawton (2025) claim that hybrid arrangements when poorly designed might undermine engagement and well-being, especially when digital workloads cause technostress or burnout. Likewise, Maity and Lee (2025) discover that hybrid models would be able to facilitate productivity through maintaining autonomy but still have a portion of face-to-face cooperation, yet the limitations of weak digital infrastructure and communication failures still exist. Bloom, Han and Liang (2024) also present causal data that a structured hybrid schedule does not decrease performance. All of these studies show that the results of hybrid work are dependent on the effectiveness with which organisations can handle flexibility, coordination, and support systems.

Nonetheless, the literature is still limited due to the lack of consistent definitions and methodological limitations. According to Luring and Jonasson (2025), most literature confounds hybrid, remote, and flexible work, making it difficult to compare and develop theories. Jaß *et al.* (2024) and Stempel and Dettmers (2025) also cite sectoral bias with the results of public administration not necessarily applicable to knowledge-based corporate environments. Also, a lot of evidence is cross-sectional and survey based, which restricts causal understanding. This leaves a definite gap to context-sensitive case research that explores the functioning of hybrid work in reality and how leadership influences its results.

### **2.2.2 Transformational leadership in digitally mediated work**

Transformational leadership continues to form a key point of explanation of how leaders marshal force within uncertain, dispersed and technology mediated work environments. Lai *et al.* (2020) demonstrate that transformational leadership positively affects job performance by way of work engagement, and their multitemporal, multisource design boosts confidence in this mediation pathway by minimizing common-method bias. This research work is important as it goes beyond a mere leadership-performance relationship and establishes engagement as the fundamental process by which leaders can affect effort and task performance. Equally, Boccoli *et al.* (2024) reveal that transformational leadership remains to provoke engagement in remote settings, but it yields more favourable outcomes when the leaders have high levels of digital communications skills.

Recent studies further narrow the point of view with emphasis on psychological resources. Kim and Yoon (2025) discover that transformational leadership can improve innovative behaviour based on psychological capital and thriving at work which implies that leaders are not only able to promote motivation but also the capability and energy of employees. This argument is extended by Zhang and Deng (2025), who demonstrate that transformational leadership affects the adverse effects of digital fatigue on engagement positively, but transactional leadership affects it negatively. This difference is key, as it shows that leadership approaches work differently in a digital overload situation.

Nevertheless, there is also a piece of evidence that transformational leadership does not always work. Boccoli *et al.* (2024) stress that its effect hinges on perceived supervisor support and digital competence. In their systematic review, Kim *et al.* (2025) opine that leadership in hybrid situations should include trust-building, emotional intelligence, and digital capability with conventional visionary behaviours. These findings do not refute the theory but rather tune the application of the theory.

One of the gaps still lies in the conceptualisation of transformational leadership in hybrid work. It can also serve as a motivational engine, a coordination system or an alternative to less co-location. Although available research indicates all three functions, there is

scanty information on how the three functions interrelate in real organisational situations over time.

### **2.2.3 Employee engagement as the central mediating mechanism**

The engagement of employees is generally regarded as the key mechanism that connects leadership to the performance in hybrid work, but it is also revealed in the literature that it is weak in disjointed work settings. Lai *et al.* (2020) propose the concept of engagement as the most significant medium on the basis of which transformational leadership is converted into performance and helping behaviour, which was repeatedly validated in more recent research. The same research by Rajeswari and Venugipal (2024) demonstrates that hybrid work is positively associated with productivity among IT professionals, but this can only be achieved through employee engagement, meaning that productivity can be increased only through long-term energy, concentration, and emotional dedication. Engagement thus, is not a passive attitude, but a behavioural and motivational mediator between work design and results.

In their systematic review, Kim *et al.* (2025) reinforce this idea by concluding that such leadership strategies as transformational leadership and leader-member exchange can still be effective in the hybrid environment, supported by trust-building, digital competence, and emotional intelligence. This implies that interaction is less physical and rather influenced by the perceived level of relational support. Mohase *et al.* (2025) also shed more light by showing that inclusive leadership improves employee voice based on psychological safety in hybrid settings. Though not a study on transformational leadership per se, their results point to the fact that employees can get even more engaged when they feel secure to participate and communicate freely through digital platforms.

Meanwhile, the literature determines significant boundary conditions. Boccoli *et al.* (2024) show that digital communication skills strengthen the leadership–engagement relationship, while Zhang and Deng (2025) find that transformational leadership can buffer the negative effects of digital fatigue. On the other hand, Nagori and Lawton (2025) caution that poorly developed hybrid systems can decrease engagement and well-being due to insensitivity to workload, communication, and managerial practices.

This shows that the level of engagement depends on the availability of resources, which grows with autonomy, support, and clarity, but decreases with too much digital pressure.

One of the main limitations is that engagement is frequently seen as a fixed result, but not a dynamic process that is influenced by the ongoing leadership behaviour and working conditions. The paper fills that gap by considering engagement as an ever-changing process in the environment of hybrid work.

#### **2.2.4 Productivity and performance outcomes in hybrid work**

The productivity literature is more conservative in its approach than the engagement literature, the productivity literature highlights that under certain conditions of the context, hybrid work can either support or disrupt performance. With a field experiment, Bloom, Han and Liang (2024) offer a high level of causality evidence, indicating that a two-day hybrid schedule does not decrease performance and may enhance employee retention. This observation contradicts the belief that in-person presence in the office is paramount to productivity. Its application, however, is constrained by the characteristics of the sample, which is comprised of knowledge workers whose tasks are measurable and flexible meaning that the findings could not be generalised to other industries or occupations.

Similar findings are made by Maity and Lee (2025), in their systematic review, who also conclude that hybrid work is able to support productivity through a combination of autonomy, and affordance of in-person collaboration. Meanwhile, they also single out the presence of ongoing obstacles, such as communication failures, poor digital infrastructure, and cyber threats. Rajeswari and Venugopal (2024) add a more detailed description illustrating that employee engagement mediates the relationship between hybrid work and productivity. This supports the idea that the productivity does not merely depend on the location of work but rather comes out of an active and supported labour force.

Additional support is put on the significance of organisational and team-level conditions. According to Jaß *et al.* (2024), although hybrid work brings flexibility, the advantages of this work model are often limited due to technical and cultural constraints. Stempel and Dettmers (2025) build on this point by demonstrating that hybrid work drives up

supervisory loads, where leaders not only have to cope with their own tasks but also coordinate teams that are dispersed. This implies that leadership effectiveness, timing of communication and routines in the organisations influence productivity, other than the behaviour of the employees.

Nevertheless, the interplay between leadership style and productivity in hybrid environments has not been thoroughly researched. The literature is inclined to separate hybrid work or engagement, and does not describe how leadership affects the productivity outcomes in the long run. This dissertation fills this gap by the conceptualisation of productivity as a leadership-enabled product of hybrid work conditions.

### **2.2.5 Mechanisms and boundary conditions: trust, autonomy, psychological safety and digital competence**

The recent literature is converging to the view that transformational leadership within hybrid work is enabled through a set of conditions and not a single mechanism. Demerouti (2025) claims that the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) approach can be especially useful since it has been used to explain how the well-being and performance of employees are conditioned by the balance between the demands and the resources. Gagné *et al.* (2022) also highlight, based on a self-determination theory, that technology transforms work design and that motivation relies on the fulfilment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These two points of view combined contribute to the realization that hybrid work is essentially an issue of motivation and resource distribution.

This point of view is supported by empirical studies that have established some important mechanisms of how leadership works. Boccoli *et al.* (2024) demonstrate that digital communication skills help supervisors to provide psychological presence, which implies that communication per se is a primary resource. Mohase *et al.* (2025) discover that the psychological safety promotes employee voice in hybrid environments, which means that trust and safety are conditions under which meaningful engagement is possible. Likewise, Kim and Yoon (2025) prove the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative behaviour is mediated by psychological

capital and thriving at work, and Zhang and Deng (2025) prove that such leadership can prevent the adverse impact of digital fatigue. Stempel and Dettmers (2025) also note that hybrid work also demands more leadership, especially in coordinating synchronous and asynchronous work.

Boundary conditions are also important. The relevance of trust-building, digital competence, and emotional intelligence is emphasized by Kim *et al.* (2025), whereas Nagori and Lawton (2025) insist on the need to create an effective work design and training to avoid burnout and technostress. Madison *et al.* (2025) warn that the social exchange theory is frequently applied in a simplistic manner, without taking into account the larger organisational and digital environment.

The unanswered question is not whether leadership is important, but how particular leadership behaviours generate resources, by which psychological processes, and in what hybrid circumstances, they affect engagement and productivity. This dissertation fills that gap directly.

### **2.3. Theoretical Foundation and Contribution**

The current research opts to use the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model as a major theoretical framework that is supplemented by self-determination theory (SDT) and social exchange theory (SET). Demerouti (2025) states that the JD-R is very applicable because it differentiates between job demands that drain energy and job resources that improve well-being and performance. Digital overload, fragmented communication, and boundary blurring, as well as coordination complexity, are the major demands, whereas resources are supervisor support, autonomy, psychological safety, role clarity, and reliable digital infrastructure, in hybrid work environments. This view is supported by Gagné *et al.* (2022) who demonstrate that SDT elucidates the role of work design on the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are the pillars of motivation and performance. Madison *et al.* (2025) also warns that although SET is useful in explaining reciprocity, it must not be simplified to the transactional assumptions.

JD-R model is especially suitable to the purpose of the current dissertation because it allows transformational leadership to be modelled as a crucial job resource that facilitates engagement and reduces strain in the hybrid work environments where direct supervision is restricted. SDT provides explanatory richness in that trust, guidance, and relatedness through psychological connection are elaborated as ways in which transformational leadership facilitates autonomy, competence, and relatedness, respectively. The relevance of SET is seen in the ability of the employees to give back to the supportive leadership by engaging and performing better.

The research has theoretical contribution in that it defines the way in which transformational leadership works as a resource orchestration process in hybrid work. Although the previous studies reaffirm the positive associations with engagement and performance, they do not provide much information about the ways in which these effects can be maintained in hybrid situations. This dissertation fills this gap by considering the important mechanisms of psychological safety, autonomy and clarity of digital communication and defining the conditions of boundaries such as digital fatigue, hybrid intensity and organisational digital maturity.

### **Literature Synthesis Table**

| <b>Author<br/>(s) &amp;<br/>Year</b> | <b>Title</b> | <b>Research<br/>Aim/<br/>Purpose</b> | <b>Research<br/>Method<br/>ology</b> | <b>Main<br/>Findings</b> | <b>Limitations/<br/>Gaps<br/>Identified</b> | <b>Relevance to<br/>Current<br/>Study</b> |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
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|                                            |                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                           |                       |                                                                                                                                         |                                                     |                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Laurin<br>g and<br>Jonass<br>o n<br>(2025) | W h a t i s<br>hybrid work?<br>T o w a r d s<br>g r e a t e r<br>conceptual<br>clarity of a<br>c o m m o n<br>t e r m a n d<br>understandin<br>g i t s | Clarify hybrid<br>work concept                                            | Concept<br>ual study  | T h e<br>concept of<br>H y b r i d<br>w o r k i s<br>complex<br>and flexible                                                            | Conceptual<br>ambiguity<br>a c r o s s<br>studies   | Assists<br>i n<br>outlinin<br>g a<br>hybrid<br>w o r k<br>environ<br>m e n t<br>explored in a                     |
| Jaß et<br>a l .<br>(2024)                  | J o b<br>demands<br>a n d<br>resources<br>perceived by<br>h y b r i d<br>w o r k i n g<br>employees in<br>G e r m a n<br>p u b l i c<br>administratio  | E x a m i n e<br>hybrid work<br>experiences<br>in public<br>administratio | Qualitati<br>ve study | H y b r i d<br>w o r k<br>enhances<br>flexibility,<br>yet relies<br>o n t h e<br>circumstan<br>ces in the<br>w o r k<br>environme<br>nt | Public-sector<br>focus limits<br>generalisatio<br>n | Explain<br>s t h e<br>influenc<br>e o f<br>organis<br>ational<br>environ<br>ment on<br>outcom<br>es o f<br>hybrid |

|                             |                                                                                                                     |                                                 |                                |                                                                                        |                          |                                                              |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Stempel and Dettmers (2025) | Taming the chimera of hybrid work: a work design perspective on supervisors' working characteristics and leadership | Explore leadership demands in hybrid work       | Qualitative research           | Hybrid working may result in greater supervisory and coordinating needs                | Limited contextual scope | Identifies the leadership issues in hybrid work settings.    |
| Nagori and Lawton (2025)    | The design of hybrid work for improved employee engagement and well-being: perspectives for HRD practice            | Review hybrid work design and employee outcomes | Systematic review (78 studies) | Inadequately managed hybrid work is detrimental to employees' wellbeing and engagement | Review-based evidence    | Demonstrates the relevance of the effective design of hybrid |

|                             |                                                                                                              |                                                    |                                 |                                                                                             |                                                  |                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Maity and Lee (2025)        | The impact of remote and hybrid work models on small and medium-sized enterprises productivity: a systematic | Assess hybrid work and productivity outcomes       | Systematic review               | Productivity gains come about with independence and involvement                             | Infrastructure and communication barriers remain | Facilitates assessment of productivity in hybrid working environments.               |
| Bloom, Han and Liang (2024) | Hybrid working from home improves retention without damaging                                                 | Test performance effects of hybrid work            | Field experiment                | A structured hybrid schedule is considered non-reduction                                    | Knowledge-worker sample                          | Links hybrid work and productivity with causal                                       |
| Lai et al. (2020)           | Transformational leadership and job performance: The mediating role of work engagement                       | Investigate leadership, engagement and performance | Multitemporal multisource study | Work engagement is a mediational factor between transformational leadership and performance | Context-specific sample                          | Engages in discussing how leadership is connected to performance through engagement. |

|                                    |                                                                                                                          |                                                    |                              |                                                                             |                           |                                                                     |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Boccoli<br><i>et al.</i><br>(2024) | Transformational leadership and work engagement in remote work settings: the moderating role of the supervisor's digital | Examine transformational leadership in remote work | Empirical quantitative study | Digital communication skills enhance the impact of leadership on engagement | Remote-work context       | Describes the significance of digital leadership skills.            |
| Kim<br>and<br>Yoon<br>(2025)       | How transformational leadership of managers affects employee innovative behavior in IT                                   | Explore leadership and innovative behaviour        | Quantitative survey study    | Leaders lead through their psychological capital and thriving               | Sector-specific evidence  | Identifies psychological processes that drive leadership to produce |
| Zhang<br>and<br>Deng<br>(2025)     | Protecting work engagement from digital fatigue: the contingent roles of leadership                                      | Examine leadership and digital fatigue             | Quantitative study           | Transformational leaders minimize negative impacts of digital fatigue       | Context-specific findings | Demonstrates how leadership provides continuity in                  |

|                                |                                                                                                                   |                                                  |                    |                                                                                                 |                            |                                                                                |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kim et al. (2025)              | Navigating leadership in hybrid or remote workplaces: A systematic review of employee engagement strategies       | Review leadership in hybrid workplaces           | Systematic review  | Trust, emotional intelligence and skills in digital competence are crucial                      | Limited long-term evidence | Discusses what leaders help characteristics are important for effective hybrid |
| Rajeswari and Venugopal (2024) | Exploring the impact of hybrid work model on employee productivity among IT professionals : the mediating role of | Examine hybrid work, engagement and productivity | Quantitative study | There is evidence that employee engagement lies between these factors and productivity outcomes | IT-sector focus            | Encourages participation as a means to productivity                            |

|                                  |                                                                                                    |                                                         |                    |                                                                         |                          |                                                                   |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mohas<br><i>et al.</i><br>(2025) | Inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and employee voice in remote and hybrid work employees | Investigate leadership, psychological safety and voice  | Empirical study    | Psychological safety promotes employee voice and participation          | Focus on voice behaviour | Describes the importance of psychological safety for engage       |
| Demer<br>out<br>(2025)           | Job demands-resources and conservation of resources theories: How do they help to explain          | Explain employee wellbeing and performance through JD-R | Theoretical review | Resources to counter work demands and enhance outcomes                  | Broad theoretical focus  | Serves as the key theoretical underpinning for this dissertation. |
| Gagné<br><i>et al.</i><br>(2022) | Understanding and shaping the future of work with self-determination theory                        | Explore motivation in technology-enabled work           | Theoretical review | Motivation is rooted in a focus on autonomy, competence and relatedness | Broad conceptual focus   | Supports use of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in the            |

|                              |                                                                        |                                                        |                    |                                                                      |                                      |                                                     |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Madison <i>et al.</i> (2025) | Social exchange theory in leadership research: A problematizing review | Critically examine Social Exchange Theory applications | Theoretical review | Reciprocity is not enough to account for behaviors in the workplace. | Oversimplification in prior research | Uses a context informed view of leadership relation |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|

**Table 1: Literature Synthesis Table**

(Source: Self-created)

## 2.4. Conceptual Framework

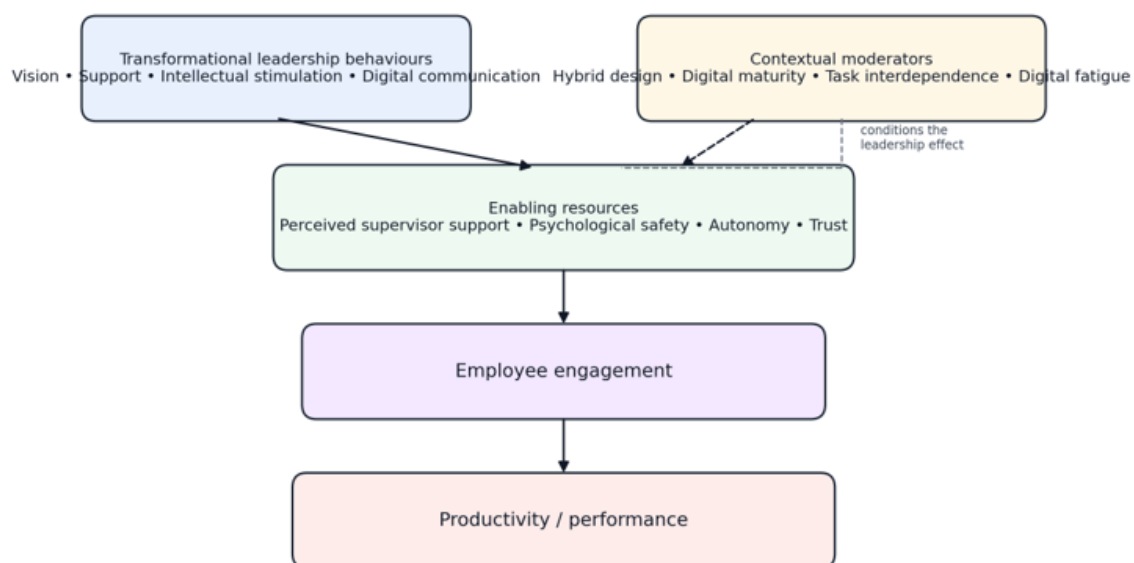


**Figure 2.4: Conceptual Framework for Transformational Leadership in Hybrid Work**

(Source: Self-created)

The conceptual framework incorporates the literature reviewed in a systematised model of how transformational leadership impacts employee engagement and productivity in hybrid work settings as well as acknowledging the influence of contextual conditions

that can facilitate or undermine these relationships. Instead of explaining things as they are, the framework acts as an analytical tool to be used to analyse the cases and make cross-case interpretations.

The transformational leadership is the main aspect of the framework and is represented by behaviours, which include articulating the vision, offering personalised support, provoking intellectual stimulation, and ensuring regular communication, regardless of the digital channel. Boccoli *et al.* (2024) suggest that these behaviours are especially effective in remote environments when they are supplemented by excellent digital communication possibilities, and Kim and Yoon (2025) prove that transformational leadership leads to the growth of psychological capital and thriving of employees. Transformational leadership is, thus, identified as the key explanatory variable, though not a causal factor alone.

The initial mediating layer is comprised of relational and motivational resources, such as the perceived supervisor support, psychological safety, autonomy, trust, and psychological capital. Lai *et al.* (2020) argue that the relationship between leadership and performance is mediated by work engagement and Mohase *et al.* (2025) demonstrate that psychological safety facilitates the voice and participation of employees in hybrid situations. Gagné *et al.* (2022) also highlight the role of autonomy and relatedness in the maintenance of motivation in flexible working. These resources describe the way leadership behaviours are converted to day-to-day work experiences.

The second mediating factor is the employee engagement, the instantaneous psychological consequence of a resourceful leadership, and the intermediate performance driver. Rajeswari and Venugipal (2024) show that the interaction between hybrid work and productivity is mediated by engagement, whereas Zhang and Deng (2025) emphasize that it helps to alleviate digital fatigue. Engagement is consequently put as the pivotal connection between leadership and organisational results.

The last outcome is productivity, which is perceived as maintaining performance in tasks, collaboration, and contributing effectively. Maity and Lee (2025) indicate that hybrid work can increase productivity when it is backed by a strong collaboration and

infrastructure whereas Bloom, Han and Liang (2024) report that there is no intrinsic performance loss in well-constructed hybrid models.

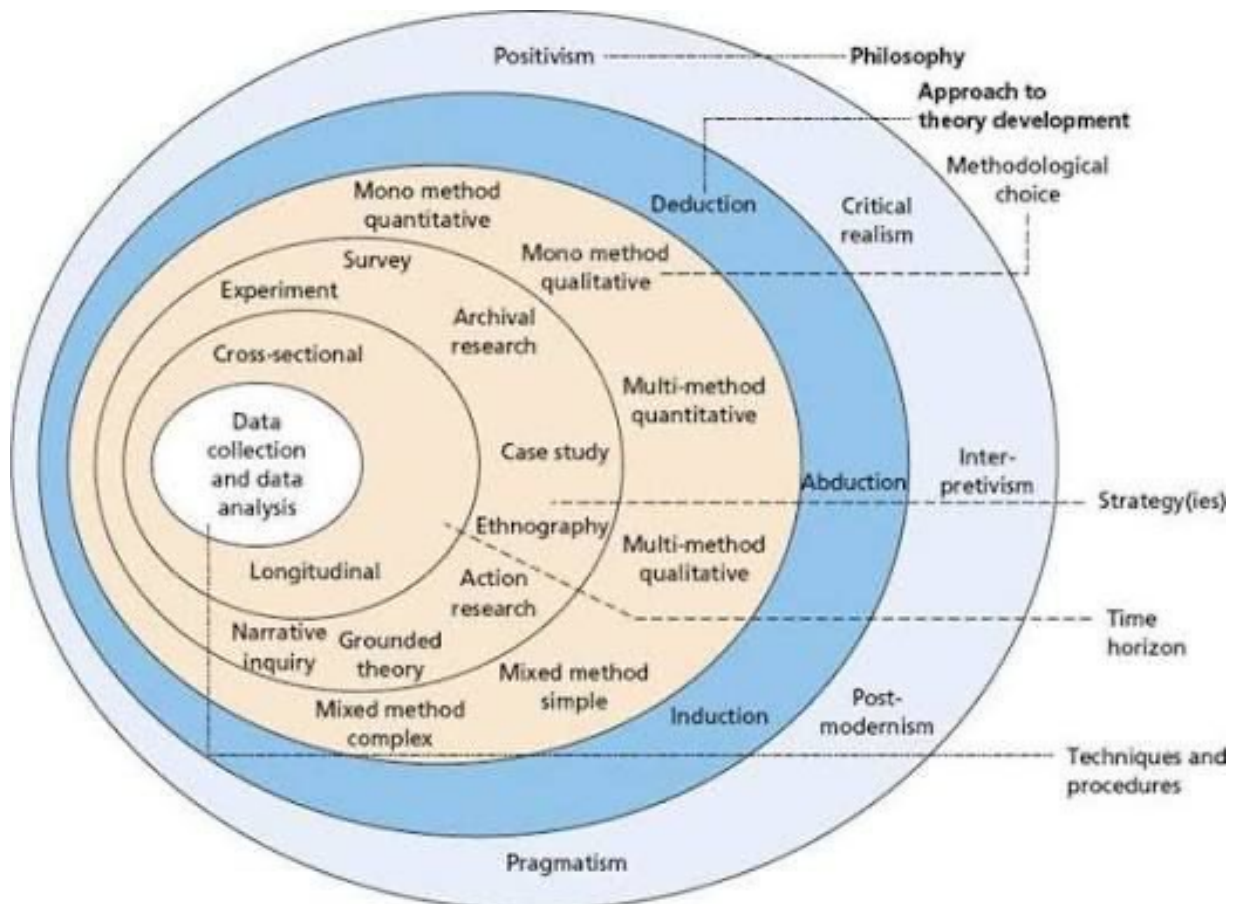
There are two contextual moderators, the hybrid-work design and the digital work strain, which exist within the framework. Hybrid design is an organisational style of coordination and infrastructure and digital strain is the overload and fatigue. Research by Jaß *et al.* (2024), Stempel and Dettmers (2025), and Nagori and Lawton (2025) reveals that these may contribute to or hinder engagement and productivity.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated that the writings on hybrid work are shifting towards an overall excitement to a more specific articulation. The recent research is unanimous that hybrid work has the potential to facilitate flexibility, retention and productivity, but only with the help of the organisation formulating communication, coordination and leadership thoughtfully. The review has also revealed that transformational leadership is still very relevant in distributed work; however, now it functions using digital communication skills, psychological safety, autonomy and support and not proximity. Interaction turned out to be the essential mediating factor between leadership and productivity, and digital fatigue, ineffective infrastructure and ambiguous hybrid design became frequent obstacles.

The gap that is most significant throughout the literature is that the correlation between transformational leadership and employee outcomes in a hybrid work has not been specified. Research has identified positive relationships, but has not yet clarified enough on how the leadership acts as a resource in hybrid environments, how it interacts with the digital requirements, or how the relationships differ across organisational environments. This is the reason why JD-R is the main theoretical perspective of this dissertation, although self-determination theory and social exchange theory are the supporting views. Collectively, these structures enable the research to not only explore the question of whether transformational leadership is important, but also how, when and with what implications to engagement and productivity.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY



### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research design employed to analyse transformational leadership in the hybrid-work environment of Microsoft and respond to questions in the study about employee engagement, productivity, and the practice of leadership. This chapter presents the research philosophy, research approach, case strategy, data sources, analytical procedure, rigour and the ethical considerations. It also demonstrates how the selected methods assist with having a clear and systematic descriptive explanation of the phenomenon under study.

### **3.2 Research Philosophy, Approach, and Design**

The study is based on an interpretivist philosophy since the primary focus is to comprehend how transformational leadership is reflected, construed, and made relevant in the context of hybrid-work at Microsoft instead of viewing leadership as an objective and measurable entity. Interpretivism presupposes that social construction of organisational realities is based on human interactions, perceptions, and contextual conditions. When hybrid work is involved, there are dissimilarities in the experience of leadership behaviours in the digital and physical world, and it is required to investigate how leadership behaviours are shared, sensed, and realised in the real world. Case study research is typically consonant with interpretivism since it focuses on context, meaning, and real-life environment where organisational activity occurs, where complex phenomena can be better understood in a more profound and subtle manner (Mtisi, 2022). The concentration of the study on Microsoft as a context-specific instance of hybrid leadership at work is thus justified by this philosophical position.

The study is descriptive in nature since the aim is to present a clear, systematic, and faithful description of the available evidence on leadership behaviours, employee engagement, and productivity in the hybrid environment of Microsoft. Instead of trying to coerce totally new theory or testing of the cause-and-effect relations with the help of statistical means, the study aims at systematising and making sense of the existing evidence in a systematic and significant manner. In this regard, the qualitative description is especially appropriate, as it emphasizes detailed and simple descriptions of events and organisational practices and does not entail the unjustified abstraction or over-theorisation (Hall and Liebenberg, 2024). This has ensured that the analysis is based on the data and is highly representative of how leadership is reported and discourse in the chosen sources.

The deductive approach is chosen as the study is informed by the already existing conceptual framework based on the literature on transformational leadership, employee engagement, and hybrid work. These theoretical underpinnings give the first framework of analysis, which can be applied to the case resources of Microsoft. Deductive qualitative research is also appropriate in those situations when the researcher relies on

the already existing concepts to analyse the real-life data to determine how theory can be applied to a particular setting and to improve it when needed (Fife and Gossner, 2024). The method thus starts with theory and critically reviews how the empirical data of Microsoft validates, extends or contradicts those theoretical anticipations.

### **3.3 Justification for Case Study Methodology**

The use of a case study approach is suitable owing to the fact that the dissertation is dealing with a modern organisational phenomenon that is not readily detachable of its real-life context. The organisational culture, digital infrastructure, and changing employee expectations are the factors that influence transformational leadership during hybrid work and interact in complex ways. Case study research is common when the objective is to understand the nature and cause of a phenomenon that occurs in such an environment and when the boundary between the phenomenon and the environment is not clearly defined (Mtisi, 2022). Microsoft offers a well-defined and appropriate case since its hybrid-work practices, leadership communication and employee support strategies are thoroughly documented and related to the overall global shift to hybrid working. This allows the study of leadership behaviour in an effective and very significant organisational context.

The case study approach is also appropriate since it allows a descriptive and detailed narration of a complex organisational process and not the reduction of the phenomenon to single variables. Quantitative measurement alone cannot be used to fully comprehend leadership in hybrid work, as they are perceptions, behaviours, and organisational dynamics and need to be interpreted by situational context. The use of secondary qualitative research based on publicly available data is becoming an important method of the field due to its efficiency, coverage, and access to a diverse variety of reliable sources in case of limited access to organisations or participants themselves (Cheong et al., 2023). It is especially applicable when it comes to the current research in which it is necessary to develop a consistent and evidence-based interpretation using available materials. The study can use various documentary materials to obtain a balanced view of the leadership practices within Microsoft in a hybrid environment by drawing myriad viewpoints.

### **3.4 Case Selection and Sampling Strategy**

Microsoft was chosen as the sole case as it is an informational organisation with a rich and highly visible history of hybrid work, leadership practice, employee engagement, and workforce transformation. In deductive qualitative research, purposive case selection is suitable since the case is selected due to its immediate relevance to an analytical focus that is pre-defined and because it can be used to shed light on theory in a real-life situation (Fife and Gossner, 2024). Microsoft represents a highly appropriate case in this dissertation as all information is publicly available and well-documented, which means that it is feasible to study the transformational leadership in the context where organisational practices are current and substantive. It is not statistical generalisation, but a kind of analytical understanding of the functioning of transformational leadership in a high-profile hybrid-work setting and how it can influence engagement and productivity outcomes.

Relevance, richness, accessibility and credibility were chosen as the selection criteria. Relevance implied that the case had to be closely related to hybrid work and transformational leadership to ensure that the analysis of the case was closely aligned with the research questions. Richness implied that there had to be sufficient documentary content to serve as the foundation of an organized and in-depth analysis of the leadership environment at Microsoft, as opposed to a shallow overview. In the secondary-data design, making the evidence publicly accessible was an accessibility requirement that made the research transparent, replicable, and ethically appropriate. The credibility meant that the materials should be based on the recognised organisational sources and peer-reviewed academic researches, to ensure that the analysis would have credible and verifiable evidence.

### **3.5 Data Sources and Data Collection**

The research is based on secondary research. The evidence base consists of peer-reviewed journal articles that cover the topics of transformational leadership, hybrid work, employee engagement, productivity, and qualitative research methods, as well as publicly available corporate documents at Microsoft that offer the critical case-level context. These company publications consist of formal reports, organisational

messages and publicly issued statements that capture Microsoft hybrid-work practices and management styles. It is a well-known fact that secondary qualitative research is a suitable and rigorous approach, when the researcher analyses publicly available content, as it enables him or her to employ a wide scope of sources and at the same time ensures transparency in identifying, selecting and interpreting the data (Cheong et al., 2023). This method is especially appropriate to the current research since it allows obtaining the high-quality and real-life organisational data without direct organisational access or primary data collection.

The search and screening process of data collection was systematic and organized to maintain consistency and relevancy. Recent peer-reviewed studies were identified in academic databases and academic search engines to ensure that the theoretical basis was up-to-date and solid. Simultaneously, Microsoft-related documents were gathered according to the official public sources to be authentic and reliable. The inclusion criteria were that the sources had to show a direct connection to transformational leadership, hybrid work, employee engagement, or productivity, and be able to contribute meaning to the context of Microsoft as an organisation. Duplicated materials or loosely related to the area of research or too generic in nature were left out to ensure that the analysis remained transparent. All sources chosen were noted down with special attention to period of publication, type, and relevance in terms of thematics, thus forming a clear and traceable dataset. The systematic organisation of sources facilitated consistency in the analysis phase and enhanced the overall approach to rigour of the study.

### **3.6 Data Analysis Approach**

The analysis was done in terms of the six stages of thematic analysis in the works of Braun and Clarke in familiarisation, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and writing up. Thematic analysis is a popular technique as it provides a structured but flexible means of recognizing and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative data, without losing the process to obscurity (Ahmed et al., 2025). The conceptual framework informed the deductive coding process where initial codes were informed by the literature on transformational leadership, engagement, productivity, and hybrid work. This was narrowed down upon by a close reading of the Microsoft

materials to allow the analysis to be theory-oriented, but still responsive to the particular use of language and focus of the case. It is the type of work where deductive qualitative analysis should be used as it will enable theory to be tested, improved, and, when needed, modified based on the evidence (Fife and Gossner, 2024).

The resulting themes were structured into a descriptive report of the leadership practice at Microsoft and the reported connections between the leadership practice and the hybrid-work outcomes. The analysis was not aimed at determining causality in a statistical manner. Rather, it sought to generate a cautious thematic explanation of the representation of transformational leadership in the context of engagement and productivity.

### **3.7 Research Quality and Rigour**

Triangulation of peer-reviewed studies and Microsoft documentary sources was used to enhance rigour. Triangulation enhances credibility since it enables the same issue to be verified using varied types of evidence, which result in a more reliable and balanced description of the phenomenon (Ahmed et al., 2024). The source logging, coding notes as well as theme-development records were kept in a transparent audit trail to ensure that the analytical process could be traced.

The use of recent and relevant sources helped to build credibility and the sufficient contextual detail helped to build transferability as the reader can judge how far the results can be applied to similar hybrid-work environments. Reliability and confirmability were facilitated through the use of same screening and coding logic throughout the material and only those themes that were consistently demonstrated across sources were maintained. The primary objective was to make the analysis systematic, transparent and academically defensible.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

The research was conducted by using publicly available secondary sources and did not involve any human participants thus no informed consent, participant withdrawal, and confidentiality processes were necessary in the common definition of participant-based research. The project was thus a low-risk desk-based study, which is consistent with the

form of ethics, and the lack of primary data collection. Every source was cited properly and analysis was done carefully to prevent selective reporting, distortion or misrepresentation of organisational practices of Microsoft.

The moral stance was also justified by the restricted scope of the study to publicly available evidence and by not trying to deduce the personal information of the employees. This restricted the work within the approved research limits and fitted it with the profile of data protection and ethics in the project.

### **3.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has established an interpretivist, deductive, descriptive case study methodology of Microsoft. It has demonstrated why the case study approach is suitable, the selection process of the case and sources, the manner in which secondary data were collected and how thematic analysis was employed to come up with findings. Rigour and ethical compliance were also described in the chapter on how it was maintained in the process. The following chapter gives the results of this approach.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The findings of the secondary data are reflected in this chapter based on the publicly available sources on Microsoft and the recent peer-reviewed publications. This chapter is divided into three case studies with a Microsoft alone thematic case study as the dissertation is founded on Microsoft as sole organisation environment. The chapter breaks down the material into three specific cases, which describe how Microsoft has tackled the hybrid work, collaboration, and employee connection instead of recognizing the evidence as a single descriptive account. Examples are the flexible work policy and leadership communication of Microsoft, the Microsoft Teams and the design of a hybrid meeting, and Microsoft Viva Engage as an internal communication and belonging platform. All these examples suggest that Microsoft has made hybrid work not only a location policy, but a more general model of operation, which links autonomy, coordination, and employee experience. The chapter concludes with the summary of the most important patterns preceding the discussion in Chapter 5.

### **4.2 Case Study 1: Microsoft's Flexible Work Policy and Leadership Communication**

#### **4.2.1 Introduction and Background**

Microsoft is a multinational technology company whose primary business is in the productivity software and cloud services, devices and enterprise collaboration solutions. The company also has a 2025 Annual Report that mentions productivity, business processes and hybrid consistency as the most important components of the company value proposal, hence the importance of the company as a particularly valuable case to look into when it comes to studying hybrid work on a large scale (Microsoft, 2025). Even Microsoft has its flexible work page, which mentions that the concept is geared towards achieving business goals, encouraging teamwork and performance, and providing its employees with the flexibility to succeed (Microsoft Careers, 2025). The importance of this policy background is that Microsoft is not just talking about hybrid work on the surface; it is actually doing it as well and selling much of the digital tools that allow it to do so. The new conceptual literature on hybrid work indicates that the term

encompasses hybridity in terms of modality, location and temporality, i.e., that hybrid arrangements are not homogenous and need to be understood in context (Lauring and Jonasson, 2025).

#### **4.2.2 The Challenge or Opportunity**

The key issue that Microsoft had to face was the preservation of collaboration, accountability, and productivity in a setting, where the employees were not co-located by default. According to Microsoft Work Trend Index, hybrid work has become a standard and not a one-time measure of the pandemic, 38% of employees are already in a hybrid and 53% of employees are likely to be in a hybrid the next year (Microsoft, 2022). This change offered the opportunity to re-architecture work on the basis of trust and autonomy, but also rendered a precarious communication, uncertain rewards, and masquerading burnout a widespread weakness of hybrid systems, as recent studies (Williams and Shaw, 2025). In the case of Microsoft, both the strategic and cultural stakes were at stake since a poor internal hybrid model will discredit the same collaboration products and work practices that it projects to the outside world.

#### **4.2.3 The Approach and Implementation**

The response of Microsoft was to shape flexible work as a regulated operating model as opposed to a haphazard arrangement. The company claims that its flexible working culture is based on autonomy, trust and accountability and job posts define work-site expectations to create transparency of how and where work is done (Microsoft Careers, 2025). Microsoft also notes that it focuses on time zone-spanning collaboration, regular work rhythms, and wellbeing, which implies that leadership should coordinate via clarity and consistency, as opposed to physical supervision (Microsoft Careers, 2025). This strategy is supported by the Work Trend Index which introduces the hybrid shift as an element of a larger redesign of work norms, and not as a shift in office attendance (Microsoft, 2022). Practically, it implies that Microsoft views leadership communication as a process that helps to minimize uncertainty, align expectations, and maintain dispersed teams in touch with business results.

#### **4.2.4 Outcomes and Results**

The evidence available indicates that the strategy of Microsoft has created a hybrid model, which is practical albeit still developing. The Work Trend Index by Microsoft said that the hybrid work had increased seven points every year over the previous year to 38%, meaning that the model had become a standard practice in organisations (Microsoft, 2022). The same report discovered that half of the population was inclined to switch to a hybrid work the next year, and this means that the demand in this kind of arrangement is going to remain high (Microsoft, 2022). On a higher level, the reports of the company place flexibility as a means to facilitate collaboration and productivity as opposed to performance trade-off (Microsoft, 2025). This pattern is mostly supported by the supporting academic literature, though it also cautions that hybrid arrangements bring about additional pressures (around recognition, communication, and work intensity) (Williams and Shaw, 2025). Combined, the results indicate that the flexible work policy of Microsoft can be best viewed as a leadership-led system of coordination, rather than as a benefit policy.

## **4.3 Case Study 2: Microsoft Teams and Hybrid Meeting Design**

### **4.3.1 Introduction and Background**

The primary collaboration platform of the company is Microsoft Teams, which includes chat, channels, meetings, files, and integrated productivity tools, and Microsoft positions it as the centre of modern teamwork (Microsoft, 2025b). In the hybrid work environment, Teams is important since one of the most visible areas where leadership, engagement, and productivity converge is in a meeting. Both Microsoft Work Trend Index and advice on hybrid meetings indicate that the layer of work that is transformed by distributed labour and the necessity to involve remote participants in a more efficient way is that of the meeting (Microsoft, 2025c). This renders Teams a handy example to analyse how Microsoft frames a leadership issue into a design issue.

### **4.3.2 The Challenge or Opportunity**

The issue was that hybrid meetings started to be more common, but not necessarily more effective. According to Microsoft, an average Teams user has 252% more weekly meeting time and a 153% more weekly meetings than before February 2020 (Microsoft,

2025c). That trend poses productivity risk since additional meetings will be able to displace focused work, increase fatigue, and decrease the quality of participation. According to Microsoft Research, the remote attendance of hybrid meetings is particularly unfavourable to junior participants and to the participants that belong to the minority groups or less visible backgrounds and makes meeting design both an inclusion problem and an efficiency problem (Microsoft Research, 2021). Empirical studies on virtual meetings in the recent past also indicate that the advantages of virtual meetings conditional on psychological factors, including flow and low emotional dissonance, that the technology is not enough on its own (Rivkin *et al.*, 2024).

#### **4.3.3 The Approach and Implementation**

Microsoft responded by publishing detailed hybrid meeting guidance and by embedding inclusive features into its collaboration ecosystem. Its hybrid meeting guide clarifies that the meeting should be planned before, during and after an interaction, and outlines five types of meetings to enable teams to select a suitable format that suits the appropriate purpose (Microsoft, 2025d). Other features and devices presented by the company included front-row meeting designs, updated Teams Rooms experiences, smart cameras and collaborative whiteboarding to ensure that in-room and remote presence are more balanced (Microsoft, 2021). This method demonstrates that Microsoft considers the meeting a social and cognitive system and not a video call. The design rationale is aligned with recent studies of hybrid-work, which propose that a core element of hybrid productivity is the attention, timing, and meeting structure, and not the marginal ones (Williams and Shaw, 2025).

#### **4.3.4 Outcomes and Results**

The result of this strategy is an evidence-based model of meetings which attempts to minimize the hidden costs of distributed work. According to Microsoft Research, it is possible to make hybrid meetings more effective and inclusive in case the downsides of remote participation are explicitly tackled (Microsoft Research, 2021). Microsoft guidelines also provide a connection between purposeful meeting design and the decrease in stress and increased utilization of employee time, particularly in regard to meeting overload (Microsoft, 2025d). This interpretation is supported by the general

research literature, which discovered that virtual meetings could be used to enhance functioning in both work and home spheres when it establishes flow and reduces cognitive depletion (Rivkin *et al.*, 2024). As a term of findings, Teams proves to be more than merely a means of communication; it is a control point where Microsoft tries to safeguard focus, participation, and productivity in a hybrid environment.

#### **4.4 Case Study 3: Microsoft Viva Engage and Employee Connection**

##### **4.4.1 Introduction and Background**

Microsoft Viva Engage Microsoft Viva Engage is an employee communication and community platform as part of the Viva experience layer. According to Microsoft, Viva Engage is described as the social layer where employees get to share stories, become part of communities, attend virtual events, and get a sense of belonging at work, and it also writes that it is a continuation of Yammer with leadership engagement, knowledge management, and analytics added (Microsoft, 2025e). The case is significant as the hybrid work undermines the informal contact that supports the employees in feeling a sense of belonging to managers, peers, and organisational purpose. New qualitative studies on hybrid working suggest that belonging within hybrid environments is contingent on remote-working patterns, as well as onsite human contact, rendering relational infrastructure an imperative concern as opposed to a soft one (Urrila *et al.*, 2025).

##### **4.4.2 The Challenge or Opportunity**

The fundamental issue was the question of maintaining employee engagement and a feeling of belonging when work is distributed both geographically and through time. The fact that hybrid work raises the likelihood of transactional and uneven and even invisible communication is particularly true when workers are not in the same room a significant portion of the week. The literature that has been consulted remotely proves that remote work has the potential to enhance control over time and increase virtual communication practices but also denies the human bond and information sharing unless organisations proactively counterbalance it (Urrila *et al.*, 2025). In the case of Microsoft, it offered a

chance to leverage a specific social platform to facilitate in-house communication, leadership presence, and networked learning in a massive company.

#### **4.4.3 The Approach and Implementation**

The implementation of Microsoft focuses on interconnection via communities, discussions and participation of the leadership. Viva Engage enables the employees to form and join communities, update and tell stories, be part of virtual events, and have access to moderation and analytics capabilities that enable administrators to manage participation on a large scale (Microsoft, 2025e). Microsoft also frames the platform as a component of a larger employee experience system, which combines with Microsoft 365 and Teams that engage employees in their daily work and not a stand-alone HR portal (Microsoft, 2025f). It is an important design due to the findings of the internal communication research that consistently indicate that the engagement of the employees is enhanced when communication is two way, visible, and organisational-identity related (Verčič *et al.*, 2021). In the example of Microsoft, Viva Engage transforms that idea into a digital community architecture, which can scale to the needs of dispersed workers.

#### **4.4.4 Outcomes and Results**

The most evident measurable outcome that can be observed in the public evidence is scale. According to Microsoft, Viva Engage is aimed at the biggest companies and can provide hundreds of thousands of employees who are involved in networks and communities (Microsoft, 2025e). That scale is important since it reveals that the platform can support communication and community interaction among the large and distributed workforce on a leadership level. The most probable organisational impact is increased visibility of employee voices and enhanced knowledge circulation and increased foundation of belonging, but these impacts are less quantitative than financial in the data at hand. According to the hybrid-work literature, the significance of this type of connection infrastructure is that belonging rather than the opportunity to use tools is a contributor to the sustainability of hybrid work (Urrila *et al.*, 2025). In this regard, Viva Engage seems like the Microsoft answer to the social aspect of hybrid work, within itself.

## **4.5 Data Sources and Citation**

The chapter is grounded on publicly accessible secondary data, mostly comprising of Microsoft corporate and research content, such as the 2025 Annual Report, the Work Trend Index, Microsoft Careers pages, Microsoft Teams product information, Microsoft Viva materials, and Microsoft Research publications. Open-access, peer-reviewed recent research sources on hybrid work, virtual meetings, internal communication, and belonging in hybrid settings were added as a supplement to these sources to facilitate interpretation and comparison. Each of the cited evidence is publicly available, and this enables the findings to be verified and tracked down to the original documents. The case level evidence is presented in the Microsoft sources, and the academic literature serves to frame the findings in the context of the existing literature on hybrid work, productivity, engagement, and connection.

## **4.6 Chapter Summary**

The results indicate that Microsoft considers hybrid work as an integrated policy, technology, and experience as opposed to a mere decision of whether to work at home or the office. In all three cases, there is an apparent trend: leaders exercise their authority by being clear, intentionally designed, and digitally coordinated instead of merely being physically close. The flexible work policy at Microsoft views autonomy and accountability as mutually reinforcing, Teams is utilized to restructure meetings to include and focus, and Viva Engage offers a social layer to belong and communicate internally. The data also indicate that the primary risks of hybrid work are not just technical, but relational as productivity is defined by the satisfaction of the quality of meetings, the rhythm of communication and the quality of communication between the employees and leaders. These results are the empirical foundation of Chapter 5, where the Microsoft cases will be contrasted with the literature in order to clarify what they demonstrate about the leadership of hybrids and transformational leadership.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis**

### **5.1 Purpose and Positioning**

This chapter is based on the theoretical and empirical perspective of Chapter 2 to interpret the findings of Chapter 4 based on the Microsoft case. It does not restate the case descriptions, as its role is to generalise the implications of the findings to transformational leadership, employee engagement, and productivity in hybrid work (Demerouti, 2025).

Hybrid work is now perceived as a multi-faceted and flexible model as opposed to the mere division between the office and the home hence it needs to be interpreted using theory as opposed to being optional (Lauring and Jonasson, 2025).

The conversation then revolves around the processes that transform the leadership behaviour into results, in particular, trust, autonomy, psychological safety and quality of communication (Gagné et al., 2022). Whether transformational leadership is relevant in hybrid work or not is not the main question, but how and in what circumstances, it can enhance engagement and productivity (Boccoli et al., 2024).

The Microsoft experience indicates that leadership is best achieved through embedding the hybrid system design instead of being only manifested in personal style (Microsoft Careers, 2025). This is what makes this chapter both interpretive and integrative as it links the findings to the literature and narrows down the conceptual model of the dissertation (Stempel and Dettmers, 2025).

## **5.2 Analytical Framework and Logic**

The discussion is based on the conceptual framework created in Chapter 2, the Job Demands-Resources model is the primary explanatory model, and the self-determination theory and the social exchange theory are the supplementary lenses (Demerouti, 2025).

JD-R is practical since it describes how the hybrid work can generate tension due to digital overload, disjointed coordination, and boundaryless boundaries and how leadership can alleviate the tension by providing resources like clarity, support, and autonomy (Demerouti, 2025).

This interpretation is reinforced by self-determination theory since flexibility should be motivating as it requires hybrid workers to have competence, autonomy, and relatedness, not isolating (Gagné et al., 2022). The social exchange theory introduces that a supportive leadership creates a reciprocal commitment in such a situation when employees believe that they are trusted and are willing to give back (Kim et al., 2025).

The analysis will be thematic as opposed to case-by-case, as the objective is to make comparisons of the three Microsoft cases with the literature and to make cross-case inferences (Lauring and Jonasson, 2025). This framework enables the discussion to transition beyond patterns to mechanisms and subsequently implications which is suitable to a case-based dissertation that involves the use of secondary evidence (Stempel and Dettmers, 2025). Whether or not hybrid work works is not the most vital question, but whether or not transformational leadership can assist the organisation to

maintain engagement and output when work is distributed over time and space (Boccoli et al., 2024).

## **5.3 Cross-Case Synthesis: Compare and Contrast with Literature**

### **5.3.1 Hybrid Work as a Design Problem Rather Than a Location Policy**

#### **Literature Anchor**

As it was established in chapter 2, hybrid work needs to be seen as a flexible system, as opposed to a mere division between remote and office work. Recent research defines hybrid work in terms of location, timing and coordination and indicates that hybrid work is not only effective based on the presence of employees but also based on the organisational design (Lauring and Jonasson, 2025). This point of view goes beyond the previous assumptions that a hybrid work is a work schedule arrangement.

#### **Evidence from Chapter 4**

The Microsoft cases show that the model of hybrid work is considered to be an operational model based on trust, infrastructures, and communication structures. The redesigned processes of collaboration, structured practice of meetings, and tools which kept the connection between distributed teams were the factors which supported flexible work policies (Microsoft Careers, 2025).

#### **Compare–Contrast Analysis**

The results are consistent with the literature in that flexibility is supported by organisational structures in order to make hybrid work a success. The strategy of Microsoft proves that work is coordinated in terms of its effectiveness, and not the place of work. The literature is also expanded by the evidence of the way design-related choices can be manifested with the help of meeting norms, internal communication, and integration of platforms (Microsoft Research, 2021). But, as much as literature might be talking of hybrid work on a conceptual level, the evidence on Microsoft has brought out operation work. Systems which direct collaboration and accountability seem to be lacking without policies.

## **Contingencies and Mechanisms**

The hybrid work seems to be the most efficient in case organisations strike a balance between flexibility and well-defined communication patterns and performance standards. The ability of organisations to have well-coordinated mechanisms might yield better results as compared to the informal organisations.

### **Interim Takeaway**

Hybrid work is best viewed as an operating system designed, and not as a location privilege. Organisational structure defines the flexibility which has positive results or not.

## **5.3.2 Transformational Leadership as a Generating Mechanism Resource.**

### **Literature Anchor**

Chapter 2 hypothesized that transformational leadership has motivational and relational resources that enable employees to work in hybrid environments. Literature on leadership indicates that trust, empowerment, and shared purpose are some of the ways a transformational leader promotes engagement (Boccoli et al., 2024). The relevance of these behaviours is enhanced by the fact that employees are working under less physical supervision since they are working in a hybrid environment.

### **Evidence from Chapter 4**

In all the Microsoft cases, leadership was based on autonomy, accountability and communication. Leaders were supposed to provide an environment where the employees could work without being much attached to the organisational objectives (Microsoft Careers, 2025).

### **Compare–Contrast Analysis**

The results are consistent with the literature in that transformational leadership is effective in a distributed setting. The approach of Microsoft shows that leadership contributes to engagement, as it offers clarity and support and not control. This supports the hypothesis that leadership is a psychological source in hybrid work. The results also

put into question the conventional beliefs about the visibility-based leadership. Face to face does not seem to be as significant as quality of communication and consistency of relations. Instead of supervising, being connected digitally is more influential in leadership effectiveness (Stempel and Dettmers, 2025).

### **Contingencies and Mechanisms**

The results of leadership seem to be dependent upon the ability to communicate. Those leaders who are visible, trusted and responsive can have a high level of engagement compared to those who use traditional ways of monitoring.

### **Interim Takeaway**

Transformational leadership is still applicable in hybrid work but it is only effective through the quality of communication and does not rely on the physical proximity.

### **5.3.3 Engagement of the Employees as the Mediating mechanism.**

#### **Literature Anchor**

Employee engagement is one of the major mediators between leadership and performance outcomes as it was put into place in Chapter 2 during the literature review. Engagement research implies that employees can be more productive in case they feel supported, a part of a team, and when their work is meaningful (Rajeswari and Venugopal, 2024). In blended environments, interactivity is particularly significant as distance can undermine the informal connections.

#### **Evidence from Chapter 4**

The case of Microsoft Viva Engage showed that engagement could be enhanced with the help of the digital communities and the communication tools. By platform-based interaction, Microsoft has been able to establish visibility, employee voice and organisational belonging (Microsoft, 2025).

### **Compare–Contrast Analysis**

The results have a strong correspondence with the literature as they indicate that engagement correlates the leadership practices with productivity. The practice adopted by Microsoft proves that participation increases when the workers feel a part of the team and have their backs. The evidence builds on earlier research by pointing out that engagement is not a strictly interpersonal endeavour but also can be supported by organisational infrastructure.

There is a deviation in the susceptibility of involvement. The results show that the engagement can be reduced in case of over-communication or inadequately organized communication. Hybrid work thus presents challenges and possibilities to maintain the energy of employees.

### **Contingencies and Mechanisms**

Interaction seems to be the most effective when communication mechanisms are designed to promote interaction without overburden. When the leadership support is in place, poorly designed structures of collaboration can undermine engagement.

### **Interim Takeaway**

Leadership intention is not sufficient in keeping the employees engaged. The systems of organisations should be able to encourage meaningful interactions and inclusion.

### **5.3.4 Productivity in terms of the Quality of Co-ordination.**

#### **Literature Anchor**

Increasing research on hybrid work is shifting towards the view that productivity is based on the quality of coordination, and not the physical presence. Research indicates that with proper collaboration framework and expectations, hybrid work has the ability to uphold or enhance performance (Bloom et al., 2024).

### **Evidence from Chapter 4**

The Microsoft cases have the productivity as a coordination challenge. Hybrid meetings were perceived as purposeful and organized activities that needed to be inclusive and

purposeful. Microsoft emphasized the need to minimize unproductive meetings, and enhance collaboration efficiency (Microsoft Research, 2021).

### **Compare–Contrast Analysis**

The results are consistent with the literature as they show that hybrid work cannot necessarily decrease the performance. The flexibility and productivity can co-exist according to the evidence presented by Microsoft that revealed that it was possible to have a robust system of coordination.

The cases, however, are also a challenge to the assumptions that enhanced communication is a way to enhance collaboration. The number of meetings can be excessive and lead to fatigue and lack of concentration. Communication volume does not thus determine the productivity but rather the quality of the communication determines the productivity.

### **Contingencies and Mechanisms**

The productivity seems to be the most effective in cases where organisations set up clear meeting norms, digital collaboration practices, and role clarity. Poor coordination can lead to the ineffectiveness of work irrespective of the place of work.

### **Interim Takeaway**

The quality of coordination is a crucial factor in hybrid productivity and not the physical presence. Good performance is enhanced by a good structure of collaboration.

### **5.3.5 Boundary Conditions of Trust, Psychological Safety and Belonging.**

#### **Literature Anchor**

Chapter 2 singled out the two conditions: trust and psychological safety, as determinants of the positive outcomes of leadership. The literature on hybrid work recommends that participation, commitment, and confidence of employees depend on the concept of belonging and inclusion (Urrila et al., 2025).

### **Evidence from Chapter 4**

Microsoft managed to cope with these issues by incorporating the principle of visibility and involvement with the help of digital tools. These were a set of practices that were meant to keep in touch with distributed workplaces (Microsoft, 2025).

### **Compare–Contrast Analysis**

The results are consistent with the literature as it demonstrates that trust and psychological safety have an impact on engagement and productivity. When they feel accepted and encouraged, the workers will be more willing to contribute towards the same. The evidence presented by Microsoft builds on previous studies by showing that systems and routines can be used to strengthen the belonging by itself, without necessarily involving interpersonal interaction.

### **Contingencies and Mechanisms**

Trust seems to be the greatest when communicating with the leaders on a regular basis and participation is encouraged. Isolation or decreased visibility within the employees may lead to weakening of psychological safety.

### **Interim Takeaway**

Hybrid work is run by enabling conditions such as trust and belonging. Inclusive systems and psychologically safe environments help to enhance leadership.

## **5.4 Integration to the Conceptual Model**

The results confirm the central pathway, which was suggested in Chapter 2, i.e., transformational leadership has an impact on engagement and productivity via trust, autonomy, and psychological safety (Gagné et al., 2022). Additionally, an improvement on the model has been proposed, as the Microsoft cases indicate that these mediating resources are enhanced or diminished by communication architecture, discipline of meetings, and digital community tools (Microsoft, 2025). Hybrid design, in that regard, is not a mere contextual background factor, since it also is an active mediator of leadership efficacy (Lauring and Jonasson, 2025).

The new pathway can thus be said to be the following:

Transformational leadership has a stronger positive impact on engagement and productivity when turned into visible trust, structured autonomy, and inclusive digital connection but the impact fades when the hybrid system results in overload, isolation, or inefficient meetings (Demerouti, 2025). This is aligned with the general literature on hybrid-work, which highlights that the results are based on the correspondence of the work design, employee needs, and organisational purpose (Lauring and Jonasson, 2025).

## **5.5 Robustness Considerations**

Several alternative explanations should be considered. First, the Microsoft results could be the sign of high digital maturity and not leadership, since the organisation already possesses the tools, culture and size to operationalise hybrid work successfully (Microsoft Careers, 2025). Second, the positive evidence can be subject to selection bias, as organisations that report about successful hybrid practices are more in the limelight compared to those that do not (Microsoft, 2025). Vendor materials also have attribution bias, as it is only natural that Microsoft has a vested interest in presenting its tools and policies in a positive manner (Microsoft, 2025). The chapter is thus based on triangulating between official sources of information about Microsoft and peer-reviewed literature, particularly in cases where the external information confirms that hybrid work does not necessarily lead to performance reduction but necessitates more coordination and trust (Bloom et al., 2024). This makes the discussion more appealing without causing causality to be overemphasized.

## **5.6 Practical Synthesis**

The synthesis results in three practice-ready lessons.

To begin with, hybrid work ought not to be handled as a location policy but as an operating model since only flexibility can aid in performance when accompanied by clear expectations and accountability (Microsoft Careers, 2025). Second, meeting design ought to be seen as a productivity lever, as unwanted synchrony is a source of fatigue, whereas the deliberate cooperation guards focus (Microsoft Research, 2021).

Third, visible digital belonging mechanisms should contribute to employee engagement as leaders cannot use proximity as the only factor to promote commitment in distributed teams (Microsoft, 2025). The fourth implication is that trust is to be upheld via routines

of communication, involving everyone, and foreseeable leadership behaviour (Urrila et al., 2025). One of them is that managers need to pay as much attention to digital strain as performance because the same tools that facilitate a hybrid work setup can also increase the load when they are not managed prudently (Stempel and Dettmers, 2025). These understanding led to the managerial implications of Chapter 6.

## **5.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has shown that hybrid work is the most effective when the leadership is deliberate, supportive and is part of organisational practice. The discussion has pointed out the role of trust, autonomy, engagement, and belonging in the productivity of the employees in the flexible work settings. It further revealed that hybrid work results are based on the communication quality, meeting formats, and online collaboration platforms. In general, the results go past the single factor approach to leadership by demonstrating that it is incredibly effective when it is best integrated within the broader hybrid work design and organisational environment.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter concludes the dissertation, summarizing results, providing an insight to their theoretical and managerial implications, as well as identifying study's limitations and directions for future research. The research was designed to uncover the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement and productivity in a hybrid work setting, as illustrated in the case of Microsoft. The study adopted the multi-case design, secondary data and cross-case analysis approach to explore the issue of leadership in a distributed work system and how its impact is enhanced or diminished.

### **6.2 Brief Summary of Key Findings**

The results indicate that transformational leadership continues to play a role in a hybrid work environment, but it is not as much as physical proximity is, and more related to trust, clarity and digital coordination. There were three common trends in the cases.

First, the hybrid model was most effective when viewed by it as an operating model, not a location choice. Communicating and collaborating in a flexible and focused way, with clear expectations, turned flexibility into performance.

Second, autonomy, psychological safety and shared purpose among employees grew when leadership allowed employees to have autonomy, psychological safety and shared purpose. When they felt there was support and connection, even if they didn't have to be face-to-face, employees were more responsive.

Third, when collaboration was done digitally, it did so with purpose and for greater productivity. The meetings were well organised, the platforms worked and the routines were clear and minimised confusion and protected focused work.

Meanwhile, when it came to hybrid, the results were weakened when they were overloaded, had too many meetings, or too much communication was split between in-person and virtual. In such cases, digital tools might actually exacerbate the problem, instead of solving it. The overall findings indicate that transformational leadership works effectively in the context of blended working if supported with thoughtful working design.

### **6.3 Theoretical Implications**

The dissertation offers a number of theoretical contributions. The first relates to the Job Demands-Resources model. The results validate the notion of demands and resources in hybrid working, and reveal how leadership and organisational design influence these. Digital fatigue, boundary blurring, overload of meetings were key demands, and clarity, support, autonomy, and psychological safety were resources. The cross-case evidence indicates that transformational leadership needs to be interpreted as a tool to increase resources and decrease strain and enhance engagement. This brings in the leadership as a part of the resource system as part of the Job Demands-Resources perspective.

Secondly, it is a contribution to self-determination theory. The results indicate that autonomy, competence and relatedness are key factors in the hybrid work and are not an automatic outcome. Autonomy alone was not effective, but only when combined with structure, which produced uncertainty if autonomy was not accompanied by structure. Digital systems were used to facilitate competence to make work manageable over

distance. Relatedness was of particular concern as it is an informal contact which may be diluted with hybrid working, requiring intentional connection. This implies that hybrid work is not necessarily satisfying the psychological needs, it needs to be planned in the working environment.

The third contribution is related to the theory of social exchange. The data indicates that the key to reciprocity in hybrid working is not being present in the workplace, but rather being seen to support the workplace, be consistent and trusted. When leadership was reliable, via digital communication and inclusive routines, response of employees was positive. Clearly visible and predictable support increased employee engagement and performance. If they stopped communicating or if the exchange became too tough, the feeling of exchange decreased. This implies that social exchange in hybrid working is not as informal as working in the office, but rather is a more frequent expression of trust and commitment.

The last contribution is the improvement of the conceptual model presented in chapter 2. The original model suggested a pathway between transformational leadership and engagement and productivity that involved trust, autonomy and psychological safety, as well as communication quality. Chapter 5 demonstrated that pathway was confirmed, but the pathway design is also shown to be a key active condition. The nature of the meetings, the way that people work together and digital tools used in the community influenced whether leadership behaviours were enabling resources or added burdens. Thus, the model has to be considered as a layered system, where the three components of leadership, digital infrastructure, and work design interact.

The results also give the boundary conditions. The positive impact of transformational leadership was greatest when the digital maturity was reasonably high, when the work norms were easily understandable and when the organisation already had a good level of trust. Strong leadership might not be effective in weaker environments. This makes any general statement on the transformational leadership successful in hybrid working contextually valid and demonstrates that transformational leadership's success in the hybrid context is dependent on the context.

The results corroborate the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, particularly the arguments that hybrid work is multidimensional, the role of engagement is a key driver, and the importance of digital competence and psychological safety. But the dissertation doesn't stop there—it demonstrates that hybrid work leadership is relational, too, and infrastructural. It isn't only the inspirational thing for employees; it's the arrangement of circumstances for them to work well. The insights are most applicable to large organisations, where teams are distributed, there is a high dependence on digital and there is some degree of digital maturity. They are less likely to go straight to organisations that have low technological capacity or highly routinized work that is located in a specific place.

#### **6.4 Managerial Implications**

The first implication is that hybrid work should be managed as an operating model, not a benefit. There is a need for clear expectations regarding availability, communication and collaboration by managers. It's an important consideration because flexibility is only going to help performance if it's accompanied by accountability. The rules of reacting, the purpose of the meeting and decision making should be determined at the team level. Some of the useful indicators are clarity of employees, load on the meeting and goals of the team.

The second implication is that communication is purposeful. Increase in communication is not necessarily good increase in quality comes into the picture. Too many messages and not enough organization make for fatigue and lack of concentration. Managers should therefore be able to differentiate between synchronous and asynchronous communication, and choose unnecessary meetings for the least, while using more strategic communication channels. Some metrics to monitor are meeting time, meeting satisfaction and meeting overload reports.

The third implication is that leaders should integrate autonomy with support. The results indicate that when a worker is given autonomy in his or her work and at the same time given guidance and encouragement, the employee will be responsive. Excessive control is a demoralizer and insufficient support results in isolation. This should be fostered through regular check-in, coaching and giving clear feedback by the manager. Retention

risk, level of engagement, and employee perceptions of autonomy are some of the key measures.

Organisations need to invest in digital belonging; it is the fourth implication. Communities, knowledge sharing and visible participants can enhance connection in hybrid settings through platforms. This is important as it is not enough to be in the office to be part of the family. Implementing needs technology, but it also needs to have norms for participation that are inclusive and leadership involvement to implement. Platform adoption and participation, employee voice and internal network activity are all metrics to consider.

The fifth implication is that design should be seen as one of the levers to improving productivity. Hybrid meetings can be either a help to collaboration or a time waster. Meetings should be meaningful, have a limited number of attendees and be designed to engage remote and in-person participants. Indicators of meeting design to measure improvements in work quality can include: meeting speed, meeting efficiency, and participant satisfaction.

The sixth one is that the strain of a digital product should also be measured when performing. The sixth is that digital strain should be monitored while performing. Even at the same amount of output, using hybrid systems can contribute to a rise in workload and wellbeing decreases. Stress, burnout risk and workload balance should therefore be monitored as well as the delivery of work, by managers. Some early warning indicators are increases in absenteeism, a lack of engagement, and meeting quality issues.

The big message here is that hybrid work is as successful as its leader make it. Flexibility and structure, trust and accountability, digital tools and human connection – the best is achieved when all of these are combined.

## **6.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

There are a number of limitations in this study. It was based on secondary data and therefore the results reflect the information that was made public and the way organisations represented themselves. This can add up some source/supplier bias. The

study also emphasized a big and digitally advanced technology company, Microsoft, which may not be applicable to smaller companies or less digital industries. Furthermore, the research is in an exploratory and descriptive nature and cannot be interpreted as strict causal research as this research does not use primary longitudinal data or a counterfactual design.

The results of these investigations should be applied and tested in other sectors and settings in the future. A series of studies in multiple industries would provide indications of whether the same leadership processes are in place in education, health care, manufacturing, and the public sector. It would be helpful to have a longitudinal study to enable an understanding of the changes to Hybrid Leadership effects over time. Interviews and surveys may be supplemented by digital behaviour data to obtain a more accurate sense of perception and performance in a mixed method study. For future research, understanding the effects of various leadership styles on employee response in hybrid work environments, building trust through digital channels, and the management of the increasing human-AI partnership in organisations could be explored. Evidence could be augmented with more triangulation using internal analytics and performance information.

## **6.6 Closing Statement**

This research demonstrates that transformational leadership is still very relevant in hybrid working, provided it is backed up by a good communication, trust and collaboration system design. Its most significant contribution is to demonstrate that leadership in hybrid workplaces is not simply inspirational, but structural and operational as well. The conclusions are relevant to knowledge-intensive organisations, with distributed teams and good digital maturity, where it is crucial to leverage flexibility to ensure engagement and productivity.

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