Leadership in Transition: Key Leadership Behaviours in Hybrid Work Environment

Ramadoss Aksshaya[1]; Dr. Jayasree Krishnan[2]

[1]Research Scholar, Department of Management, VELS Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Pallavaram, Chennai 600117

[2]Director, Department of Management and Commerce, VELS Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Pallavaram, Chennai 600117

Abstract: This study aims to comprehend the significance of leadership on employees working in hybrid work culture. With the advent of the hybrid work, the conventional idea of the workplace has been altered, transforming every facet of the traditional work landscape into a dynamic hybrid model that blends in-office and remote work. This change demands new leadership practices and strategies to efficiently manage and enable the workforce for current and future challenges. Hence this study explores leadership and its complexities assessing the essential traits of a successful leader in hybrid work teams. While there is a huge amount of research work and numerous studies on e-leadership, the concept of leadership in hybrid work environments needs to be explored more as it is crucial in the present landscape of work. Hence, this paper explores the opportunities and challenges of leaders in hybrid work-driven organizations. Gathering insights from various studies, our research seeks to assess and examine how leadership behaviors influence employee's motivation, commitment, and overall contribution to work-related tasks within this hybrid framework. The results will inform organizations on how to develop effective leaders in hybrid work that will be capable of motivating and empowering workers, improving the productivity, and realizing organizational visions. Leaders have a noble role in inspiring and reskilling employees hence improving the levels of employee's job engagement. Leadership plays a central role in the dynamics of workforce and the retention of employees within an organization. With organizations continuing to deal with the challenges and opportunities of hybrid work, effective leadership is more crucial in actualizing organizational goals with a humanistic approach. The study provides in-depth insights on effective leadership behaviors in hybrid environments and contributes learning points for successful leadership practice in hybrid work along with propositions for future research.

Keywords: *Hybrid Work Culture, Leadership, Employee Job Engagement, Productivity Workforce Dynamics.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid digital transformation and advancement of information and communication technology (ICT), unlocked the doors to telecommuting paving the way for remote work/telework and hybrid work models. The advancement in technology leads to dynamic changes and reconfigures the way organization's function. The hybrid work is a flexible work arrangement that offers the employees the choice of work environment. With these abrupt changes in work environment, the need for effective leadership becomes crucial. The concept of leadership has evolved in the hybrid work model and requires further study, as remote work along with technological advancements outspreads beyond the in-office workplace settings (Schwarzmuller et al., 2018). With the growing debate on opportunities and threats posed by

remote working, a more demanding concern is how to train and develop competent leaders to effectively lead hybrid workforces.

Leadership is considered a crucial factor for enabling employees to survive and accept changes in organizations successfully. The changing scenery of the work environment has created challenges such as paucity of social interaction, social isolation, and digital overload thereby demanding transparent, efficient, and holistic leadership with a humanistic approach. Rapid digital advancement has transformed organizations, opening up new avenues such as hybrid working, virtual teams, and new communication tools (Cortellazzo, 2019) influencing the way employees work, and replacing regular teamwork with virtual teamwork (Ebojoh, 2023). Technological development introduces new ways of

working, that emphasize the need to rethink and reconfigure the core elements of the organization such as leadership (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). The changes in the needs of organizations and employees reveal the importance of efficient leaders to provide sustainable solutions for organizations to thrive in the highly competitive business arena.

II. HYBRID WORK

Over the years, the nature of work has evolved from conservative cubicles to remote digital workspaces. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic affected and altered every dimension of work (Kraus et al., 2021). To thrive in a challenging business environment, organizations should embrace flexibility that goes beyond location and a collaborative approach that includes the requirements of an increasingly diverse employee workforce (Ateeq, 2022). The hybrid work is a flexible work culture that combines in-person collaboration and virtual coordination (Hooijberg & Watkins, 2021). A successful hybrid workplace requires trust, effective communication, cooperation, and recognition of employees.

The efficiency of the hybrid work model can be enhanced by effective leadership, understanding employees' requirements, and creating synergy among diverse employees. The hybrid work has a comprehensive impact on organizations, and employees and extends to the rest of the community and economy (Grzegorczyk, 2021). Hence, to successfully navigate the changing demands of the work environment, there is a need for effective organizational leaders with different and upgraded skills. However, what type of leaders and leadership behavior is appropriate for hybrid teams is uncertain (Nadkarni & Prugl, 2020), as the expectations from leaders and employees in traditional work patterns are different from the hybrid team. Additionally, while hybrid teams may include perks such as flexibility, and work-life balance for employees, it also comes with challenges such as isolation, diminished motivation, and cyber and data security (Iqbal et al., 2021). Leaders are required to invest in nurturing human assets by motivating employees, connecting regularly, and engaging employees actively in discussions and decision-making (Cortellazzo, 2019) to nurture and develop future leaders. Therefore, this study emphasizes the necessity for leaders to be skilled and prepared to manage the challenges, opportunities, and other uncertainties inherent in hybrid work.

III. LEADERSHIP

Leadership is an important multi-faceted phenomenon which has been profoundly researched over the years. Leadership is a notion that has been transforming over the years, and its importance has become greater than ever before in this digital era (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Although numerous specialized studies are there on the paradox of leadership, there are still many leadership questions to which people do not have answers (Freimuth & Svenander, 2024). According to Caputo et al., (2024), leadership is described as the source of inspiration and a way of providing directions to

the members in achieving the organizational goals successfully. There is no definite manner of leadership, since leadership has metamorphosed into a democratic leader, rather than dictatorship (Rotemberg & Saloner, 2023). Organizational leaders are supposed to be more open, connected, and transparent to the process of fostering flexible and productive working environment (Ford et al., 2021).

The hybrid work model has redefined leadership once again as it places more responsibilities on the leader since it is more complex as it requires focus on motivation, innovation, agility, and inspiration (Chafi et al., 2022). Among the greatest factors that leaders in hybrid work face is the fact they must empower themselves in order to be in position of leading their in-office and remote workers. Nevertheless, it is apparent that managing a team that is simultaneously partially in the office and partially working remotely opens up a range of unprecedented issues like the need to keep the team solid and properly communicate and motivate the team members when they are literally isolated in space. Mustajab et al. (2020) stress that nowadays, leaders should integrate their leadership with the changing technology in order to guide and connect to all their workers. This paper tries to understand the influence and the need of leadership in hybrid teams to impact meaningful ideas in organizations.

IV. THEORIES

➤ *Fred Fiedler's Contingency Theory*
According to Antonio et al., (2012), the theory can be explained to be applicable to various real-life situations because it acknowledges the reality of the real-world and applicable to creative teams to the operations management. It elaborates that team performance depends on the interplay of leadership flairs and situations that are conducive to the leader.

➤ *Situational Leadership*
Introduced by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard, theory focuses on the fact that successful leadership situations require that the leader is able to adjust their style of leadership to the level of follower maturity and competence. A review conducted by Verywell Mind (2014) showed that situational leadership has shown encouraging results regarding team effectiveness and job satisfaction, especially in highly changing situations like the COVID-19. This versatility enables leaders to be efficient by customizing their style to fit the requirements and growth phase of team members and the model has attained huge acceptance in the business and educational environment.

➤ *Transformational Leadership*
Siangchokyoo et al., (2020) in their study examines the question of whether transformational leadership really brings about meaningful change to the followers. It is revealed that transformational leadership has been related to desirable organizational performance factors like heightened performance and work satisfaction.
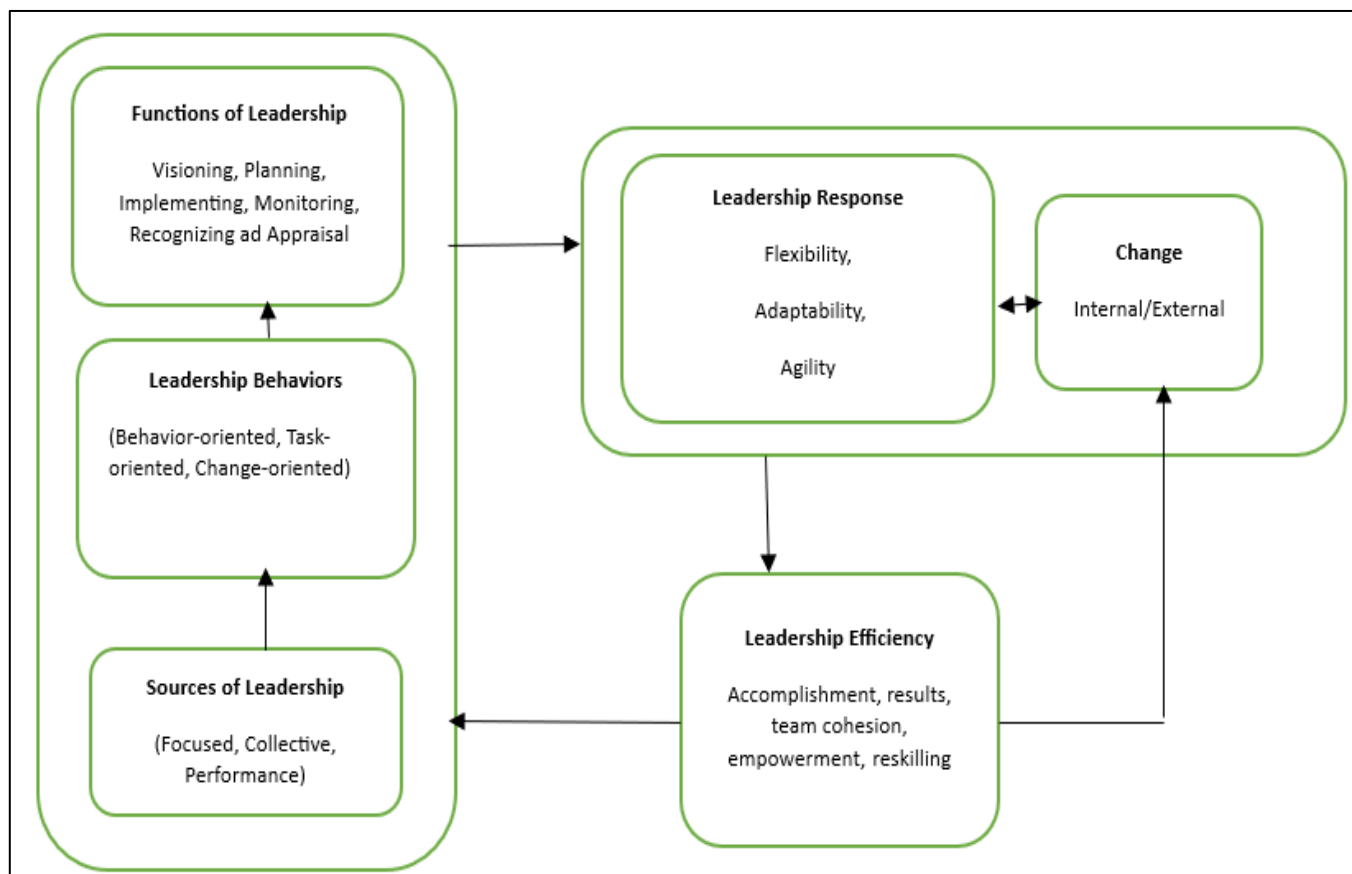
Fig 1: Leadership during Change

V. LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS AS A CONTINUUM OF THE HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENT

A. Fostering Effective Communication

Communication itself is a challenge that hybrid work has further exacerbated which is probable to make employees feel detached from their team and organization, as they are physically isolated. Leaders in hybrid work find it challenging to keep their employees motivated, engaged, and to provide support when team members need it. (Malhotra et al., 2007). Previous studies reveal that communication is an essential skill for leaders (Zimmerman et al., 2008). Yang et al, (2022) reveal that ineffective communication caused the collaboration of employees to become weak, with fewer bridges. Furthermore, there is a decline in synchronous communication. Therefore, leaders must ensure that employees are equipped with all the resources such as technology, communication tools, training and knowledge required for effective communication.

B. Emphasizing Results Over Working Hours

In hybrid work, finding a balance between being supportive, getting the work done at the workplace, and transferring ownership to remote employees is a challenge for leader (Mostafa, 2021). The first step for a successful leader is to focus on the outcomes of the employees rather than the number of hours worked. Managers need to be specific about their expectations which is defining clear goals, and objectives for each employee and then measuring their

performance based on the results (Dhillon, 2022). Leaders are required to be more involved in the team's progress and provide assistance when needed. This enables employees to be more creative in their work while ensuring tasks are completed on time.

C. Enabling Upskilling and Reskilling

Leaders should dedicate time and plan on how to encourage employees to learn new skills and develop existing ones to enable workers to use their skill set to advance their careers (Rigolizzo, 2022). To succeed in hybrid work, the development and acquisition of new skills by leaders and employees are the most important since they should allow them to successfully adapt to a changing work environment. Knowledge transfer and social learning among peers have been reduced with the elimination of the traditional workspaces. It is upon the leaders to increase the level of talent engagement and come up with measures of succession planning in view of the present-day modern workforce. A chance to be upskilled is an important aspect of retaining talents and luring new and diverse talent. The leaders are also expected to delegate duties and authority to the remote workers and make them part of active decision-making, hence shaping future leaders in the new hybrid working set-up. This builds a feeling of belonging to the remote and co-located staff and improves teamwork, job satisfaction and innovative problem solving.

D. Building Trust and Nurturing Team Cohesion

Trust is an essential element for successfully leading employees and is based on the principle that employees are more productive, satisfied, and more efficient when they're allowed to work autonomously and flexibly. Trust-based leadership comprises providing employees with ownership while still providing them with necessary support and resources to excel in their roles which in return can motivate employees and enhance efficiency. This requires leaders to empower hybrid workers by providing the necessary resources such as communication tools, support, and feedback. Additionally, leaders should host virtual social coffee calls and have friendly conversations with employees to build team bonding and professional networks, boost their morale to avoid the sense of isolation, and foster a sense of connectivity among remote workers (Bregenzer & Jimenez, 2021).

E. Promoting Fairness and Impeding Biases

Leaders need to ensure that their people, regardless of their working location, have the support and access to resources. Additionally, leaders must embrace diversity and foster working relationships based on trust (Dowling et al., 2022). To develop a positive hybrid work model, it's important for leaders to listen, respond to employee needs, and lead actively with transparency and fairness. Employees remain concerned about proximity bias as they are distantly located. Leaders should dispel such biases and ensure that the process is transparent to all employees, irrespective of their location to ensure a healthy workforce. Employees show more engagement towards the organization when they are recognized for their efforts and work by their leaders (Chamakiotis,2021).

F. Leading Hybrid Teams with Empathy and Compassion

The evolution of the work environment has augmented the focus on empathy and compassion as employee well-being has become a major concern in remote working (Eseryel et al.,2021). Thus, leaders are expected to lead with empathy, and compassion as employees are the greatest assets of organizations. An efficient leader needs to ensure employees are provided with the required resources such as communication tools, technology and skills, timely motivation, and appropriate recognition to self-actualize their goals and the organizational goals.

VI. DISCUSSION

The Hybrid work model contributes to the augment of leadership complexity; as leaders in addition to the challenges in the past, now have to coordinate workflows between remote employees and get the work (Edmondson Amy & Mortensen Mark, 2021). This study strives to provide clarity on perceived effective behaviors of leadership in hybrid work teams for insightful practice and insights for theoretical contributions and further studies related to leadership in hybrid work models. Hamburg (2021), in his study stated that the success a of leader lies in empowering his/her team to navigate challenges, adapt to changes, learn, and grow successfully. However, leaders of hybrid work teams face new challenges such as lessened communication and social interactions within the hybrid teams. This study highlights both opportunities in hybrid work, such as better autonomy, and flexibility, and drawbacks, such as social isolation, burnout, digital overload, and concerns related to motivation, job engagement, and well-being. Drawing insights from a previous works of research, this study reflects that leadership in organizations plays a crucial role in competently managing and supporting the workforce with a humanistic approach for continuous improvement in the hybrid work arrangement (Larjovuori et al., 2018).

VII. CONCLUSION

Effective hybrid leadership comprises traditional management skills and new competencies personalized to hybrid work. Leaders also need to develop a sense of emotional intelligence to create bonding with team members they meet face-to-face occasionally. Leaders additionally need to be able to effectively identify and address mental health and well-being issues that can easily go unnoticed in the hybrid work arrangement. Organizations should create a working model with the key elements of flexibility, trust, transparency, and active leadership. It is important to set basic guidelines that will assist organizations to establish a suitable, hybrid way of working. The study proposes that there is more to leadership in orchestrating the change process than the results of change. The hybrid pattern of working is the new normal with both opportunities and challenges. The study has increased the understanding of the different perspectives and expectations of leadership from leaders and employees in hybrid work teams. Also, the findings from the study present contributions to organizations by shedding more light on leadership in hybrid work teams, and the challenges involved. Further investigations can increase our understanding on what leaders expect from their employees in hybrid work. This research shares insights that can be used to shape their workforce, and management strategies, by addressing challenges and leveraging the opportunities existing in the hybrid work arrangements.

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