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Leading from a distance: Exploring leadership effectiveness and identity approaches when traditional teams are working from home

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ABSTRACT

The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic that enforced remote working changed the way organisations operate turning many face-to-face teams into virtual teams overnight with little warning. The digital transformation of work has changed the essence of how teams function which presents new leadership challenges as traditional leadership is deemed suboptimal for virtual environments. However, virtual leadership may not be a simple extension of traditional leadership practices suggesting new leadership skills are required to straddle the hybrid working model that fuses both virtual and in-person settings successfully.

As studies in hybrid leadership are in short supply, this study explored how enforced remote working influenced leaders' effectiveness and identity when managing traditional teams remotely, both of which play a critical role in performance. Data was collected from 12 semi-structured interviews with leaders to understand their experiences of leadership in this context by means of a qualitative, exploratory study. The findings suggest that leading with empathy through prioritising mental health and well-being of teams, being flexible in expectations of when and where work is conducted, embracing new technology and being the custodians of online tools and etiquette are some of the virtual leadership skills required. In addition, the findings suggest that leadership presence and influence is negatively influenced due to the lack of face-to-face engagements along with other known disadvantages of virtual teams. This study provides insights and recommendations for leading teams in hybrid environments, which is fast becoming the preferred way to work.

KEY WORDS

Hybrid Leadership; Leadership Effectiveness; Leadership Identity

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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Date: 01 November 2022

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction to Research Problem

1.1 Research Problem

The abrupt onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 impacted many businesses, leaders and teams who suddenly had to work from home, if they could, and had to rapidly adapt to the use of various technologies and platforms in new ways to not only perform their work but maintain business continuity in an attempt to minimise the spread of the virus (Waizenegger, McKenna, Cai & Bendz, 2020). This radical shift from traditional, on-site work to virtual collaboration required leaders to navigate challenges they were not necessarily prepared or equipped for, bringing rapid digital transformation into focus (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Prior to the pandemic, remote working was an infrequent and discretionary option exercised by a select few in some organisations (Wang, Liu, Qian & Parker, 2021). However, the subsequent lockdowns imposed by governments, namely restriction policies mandating people to stay where they were to reduce risks to themselves and others, forced most businesses to shut and people to work from home irrespective of their liking, capabilities, readiness or nature of work.

As leaders scrambled to deal with new challenges and changes to both the nature of work and working environments that would rely on digital mediums with little time for preparation (Waizenegger et al., 2020), digital technology and the digital transformation of work has previously been found to change the essence of teamwork and has significant implications for leadership making it even more critical for team functioning and effectiveness (Larson & DeChurch, 2020). Additionally, traditional hierarchical leadership, a more formalised position, is deemed disadvantageous in virtual settings due to the lack of in-person contact, making effective management of virtual teams and leading them more difficult, bringing identity into question (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Kwok, Hanig, Brown & Shen, 2018).

Puranova and Kenda (2018) argue that a virtual context changes the effect that various types of leadership has on team outputs and results and stress that current research has not sufficiently interrogated whether virtuality may change leadership itself, presenting an opportunity to perhaps redefine it? Furthermore, Puranova and Kenda (2018) state that the key difference between virtual leadership and traditional

leadership is how leaders go about driving and achieving outcomes and that virtuality presents a leadership paradox calling for new skills and capabilities specific to an environment. However, any work context has the capacity to create paradox and thus paradoxical leadership is not unique to virtual teams, it is rather the increase of complexity given an environment, scarcity of resources and uncertainty where paradoxes become most noticeable (Puranova & Kenda, 2018). Given this context of rapid change enforced by the pandemic, viewed through the lens of paradox theory, namely the management of competing demands, and, especially since teams are considered essential building blocks of organisations, was the leadership requirement indeed different in a virtual context for traditional leaders and their teams who suddenly had to work from home and collaborate remotely and virtually (Alaiad, Alnsour & Alsharo, 2019)?

1.1.1 What is Not Known

The rise of digital technology challenges the form leadership takes on in teams. As the success of teams that are being altered by technology relies on effective leadership, the advancement of leadership is therefore even more crucial for team outcomes (Larson & DeChurch, 2020). Given the context of this study, it is purported that traditional forms of leadership have been deemed suboptimal for virtual teams (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Rather, leadership in virtual teams is more concerned with fulfilling the needs of members, motivation, monitoring processes and performance, and thus overall team effectiveness (Nordbäck & Espinosa, 2019) as there is less hierarchical structure between leaders and team members (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Purnova and Kenda (2018) further argue that effective virtual leaders blend opposing leadership approaches to be more effective in addressing competing demands.

However, virtual leadership may not be a simple extension or fusion of traditional leadership practices but rather requires an essential change in how leaders and their teams relate to one another making it vital that leaders adapt their practices as some research gives the impression that those who can work from home prefer to do so, thus, it is suggested that virtual leadership is here to stay (Chamakiotis, Panteli & Davison, 2021; Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020). Furthermore, Chamakiotis et al. (2021) argue that managing a distributed workforce presents new leadership

challenges for traditional leaders who have pivoted to virtual leadership including having to adopt new leadership styles, ensuring work-life boundaries are not overstepped and prioritising the well-being of their teams and promoting personal connections which may have a greater influence in the functioning of virtual teams (Thambusamy & Bekiroğulları, 2020; Chamakiotis et al., 2021).

Although the hybrid model that combines a mixture of both remote work and face-to-face interaction is to become the prominent and preferred working approach post the pandemic (Wang et al., 2021) evidence is needed to support the notion that it provides the best of both working environments as studies on virtual leadership are in short supply (Contreras et al., 2020). As the context of virtual teams in extant literature is different from traditional teams who were suddenly forced to work remotely in the context of a global pandemic, which has not been widely researched before, what is not well known is what makes leadership in an enforced virtual context different from more traditional settings and thus requires further investigation.

1.2 Purpose Statement

Current speculation maintains that remote working in some shape or form is here to stay well into the future and that the pandemic, which forced many jobs to be conducted remotely, will remain permanently so (Wang et al., 2021). As previous studies were based on workers who opted to work from home for different predetermined reasons and were ultimately prepared for it (Waizenegger et al., 2020), the purpose of this study was to understand what it is like to be a leader in this new unprecedented context, forced and unprepared remote working conditions, to gain new insights as to the individual experiences leaders had and explore if and how they had to adapt their leadership approaches. Of particular interest was whether leaders had to adapt their leadership effectiveness and identity approaches to lead and manage their teams who were originally traditional, on-site teams that engaged face-to-face regularly and now largely work from home interacting mainly virtually through electronic means.

Understanding the experiences leaders had when leading from a distance aims to not only contribute to both remote e-working and remote e-leadership literature from an academic perspective, as little is known about how leaders navigate various

paradoxes within this particular context (Pearce, Wassenaar, Berson & Tuval-Mashiach, 2019), but also shed some light on a situation so many leaders are currently navigating in which there is no clear way forward regarding the future of working environments from a business perspective. Thus, new insights on the leadership implications are required to understand how leaders can effectively lead both from a distance and in-person, a gap that this study aimed to fill as well as advance the paradox theory which has mainly focused on the organisational level (Pearce et al., 2019).

1.3 Scope of Research

As remote working by virtual means was not as prolific before the onset of the pandemic as it has become since, this exploratory study aimed to understand what influence, if any, leading traditional teams operating in a sudden virtual environment had on a leader's perceived effectiveness and identity. In addition, this study also explored the individual lived experiences leaders had in this unprecedented context to gain new insights about what their leadership required and what the leadership requirements and skills might be for other leaders who straddle both virtual and in-person settings going forward. As such, the focus of this research was on the leaders themselves, particularly leaders of teams who prior the pandemic mostly worked together on-site and interacted face-to-face on a regular basis and not virtual teams per se.

In summary the objectives of this study were to:

- Understand if enforced remote working during the pandemic influenced a leader's perceived effectiveness as they led their traditional teams from home
- Understand if enforced remote working during the pandemic influenced a leader's identity as such
- Explore what skills and requirements leaders of hybrid working environments need going forward

1.4 Academic Rationale

Increasingly, the advances in technological tools and platforms in the workplace have outpaced the practice and science of leadership and warrants further investigation

(Avolio, Sosik, Kahai & Baker, 2014). Although the swift changes associated with digital disruption can be bewildering, what needs further understanding is what makes leadership in this context different and what stays the same (Kane, Phillips, Copulsky & Andrus, 2019)? Thus, this begs the question if all that is known about the field of leadership needs to be reconsidered if essential practices that enabled leaders to lead effectively in the traditional work environment requires rethinking (Chamakiotis et al., 2021)? In support of this, Contreras et al. (2020) posit that working in the hybrid environment is not a mere extension of traditional leadership practices as the way teams function has changed, prompting a need for leaders to change their practices accordingly (Mehtab, Rehman, Ishfaq & Jamil, 2017). Thus, this study aimed to contribute to the ongoing debate of what the future of leadership may look like from a theoretical standpoint.

1.5 Business Rationale

As a result of the increase of digital technology and the onset of the pandemic, teams are no longer restricted to the constraints of location, work hours, or even time zones to conduct their work, particularly for knowledge-based organisations (Choi & Cho, 2019; Alaiad et al., 2019). However, as the nature of teams is based on interdependency of tasks required to achieve a common goal (Benishek & Lazzara, 2019) they are critical for driving organisational outcomes. Closely related, leadership is based on the ability to influence such a team in the particular direction of the common goal (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018) of which being an effective leader is one of the fundamental components that determines organisational success or failure (Zeb, Ahmad & Saeed, 2018). Given that the way teams and leaders relate has changed significantly (Contreras et al., 2020; Mehtab et al., 2017) it is important to gain a deeper understanding of what influences contribute towards or hinder leadership in the hybrid working environment to provide some guidance to organisations as to what they can put in place to innovate and remain competitive (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Liao, 2017). Similarly, this study provides insight on what the future of leadership looks like and relevant skills required.

1.6 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way many organisations and their employees work (Contreras et al., 2020) of which, remote work or working from home is fast becoming the preferred method for those employees who can do so (Wang et al., 2021). As there are leadership implications of managing teams in a virtual environment, understanding the leadership influences and leadership skills required to remain effective and drive performance in a hybrid model is become more relevant.

The remaining chapters of the report will expand further on this topic covering the following content:

- Chapter 2: Literature review to understand the academic stance and identify a gap in current literature
- Chapter 3: Research questions based on the gap identified in the literature review
- Chapter 4: Research methodology used
- Chapter 5 & 6: Presentation and discussion of the research findings in relation to the literature review
- Chapter 7: Concluding remarks based on the main findings of the research; the managerial and organisational implications thereof, as well as the limitations of the research accompanied by recommendations for future studies

For the most part, the findings of this study may assist leaders who manage traditional teams in a hybrid environment in becoming more effective in doing so while simultaneously guiding organisations accordingly that can equip their leaders to better achieve desired goals and not merely survive as an organisation but thrive in this new hybrid working environment.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review begins by establishing the context of this study to help clarify what is meant by virtual teams as has been covered in current literature compared to the changing nature of working environments of traditional teams, particularly enforced remote working that was rapidly brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, or working from home, as it will be referred to interchangeably in this study. The context is then followed by an in-depth literature review of leadership and two leadership constructs namely, leadership effectiveness and leadership identity, both key aspects to effectively managing teams (Liao, 2017) to discuss what is currently known by unpacking theories and debates about what the leadership implications are in these different team settings, being virtual versus traditional teams working from home. Lastly, this section ends off by exploring the virtual paradox leadership model, the theoretical lens through which this study was viewed.

2.2 Virtual Teams

Globalisation, increasing competition and the advancement of digital technologies have largely changed how workers communicate, collaborate and work with organisations, in many instances working remotely as a member of a virtual team (Alaiad et al., 2019). Originally, teams were mainly comprised of members from one organisation often in the same vicinity and interacting face-to-face on a regular basis either collaborating or working towards a common cause, be it a product, service offering or solution which is why they are formed, and if lacking there would be no reason to collaborate (Benishek & Lazzara, 2019). Due to the rise of digital technology, teams are no longer restricted to physical proximity to one another but can be made up of members from multiple organisations and members based on the task at hand (Benishek & Lazzara, 2019). That being said, defining characteristics of teams remain membership, interdependency of tasks required to achieve a common goal, and shared or collective responsibility of the outcomes irrespective of physical proximity or location (Benishek & Lazzara, 2019).

By the same token, virtual teams have been described as a group of people put together to work on interdependent tasks over time and distance mainly using

electronic means of communication (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014) to achieve a common goal but who are likely to be dispersed geographically, socially and, or culturally (Liao, 2017). As organisations are increasingly pressured to compete for talent while simultaneously reduce operating costs and remain competitive (Liao, 2017), structuring work around teams through the advancement of digital technologies without the constraints of location, work hours, and time zones has seen the rise of virtual teams in many organisations (Choi & Cho, 2019). Thus, organisations can increasingly tap into the global talent pool of expertise to help them rapidly innovate and remain competitive without the traditional constraints and offer increased work flexibility as well as work-life balance advantages to employees which can lead to improved job satisfaction through the deployment of such virtual teams (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Liao, 2017).

2.2.1 Virtual Team Challenges

In addition to the interdependent nature of member tasks that are directed at achieving a common goal being a defining characteristic of virtual teams, it is also a key determinant of team effectiveness as influence is occurring at multiple levels (Feitosa, Grossman & Salazar, 2018). However, virtual teams experience interpersonal challenges to a greater extent than more traditional, face-to-face teams particularly due to the use of online tools that limit the observation of non-verbal communication and other subtle cues as the unplanned and impulsive engagements compared to teams that mainly engage face-to-face are less likely to occur spontaneously (Feitosa et al., 2018). Although the digitisation of teams have perceived benefits such as the ability to collaborate that is not bound by geographic location that ought to enhance teamwork, routine tasks, and communication, it has rather led to lags in member exchanges, frequent misinterpretation of communication and less impromptu engagements as interactions are more task-orientated than of a spontaneous and social nature (Benishek & Lazzara, 2019; Liao, 2017).

Moreover, increased physical distance and limited face-to face interactions further hinders virtual teams' remote work as it prevents informal observations and awareness such as tone of voice, facial expressions and body language cues that can lead to misinterpretations and misunderstandings that impede the development of trust (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020), which is another is a crucial success factor in

not only effective collaboration, but also team performance (Breuer, Hüffmeier, Hibben & Hertel, 2020).

2.2.2 Challenges Related to Leading Virtual Teams

In the same fashion, there appear to be far more drawbacks and challenges related to the management of virtual teams than the perceived organisational and employee benefits observed. As virtual teams work and collaborate outside of organisations, they rarely meet in person, if ever (Larson & DeChurch, 2020), which makes leadership even more critical to team effectiveness as digital technologies have transformed the nature of teams and how they work. Moreover, advancements in information technology have transformed how organisations are structured including leadership (Avolio et al., 2014). Previous studies have found that remote working practices can significantly impact job demands, autonomy, team dynamics and relationships which in turn influences employee performance in addition to leadership effectiveness (Wang et al., 2021).

Collaboration is deemed one of the most important processes that contribute to virtual team performance of which leadership influence is crucial (Liao, 2017) and can be enhanced through knowledge sharing (Alsharo, Gregg & Ramirex, 2017). Thus, the role of communication is critical but remains a fundamental challenge experienced in virtual teams as isolation, caused by the lack of face-to-face interactions, further reduces team contributions and participation allowing disengagement due to the lack of socialisation (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

Furthermore, Ford, Piccolo and Ford (2017) posit that trust ultimately enhances team effectiveness and that virtual teams need to not only trust their leaders and their organisations but their team members as well, but Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020) recognise that trust is more difficult to establish when relationships and physical interactions are lacking in virtual settings. Further disadvantages of virtual teams observed by Hoch & Kozlowski (2014) include a lack of group cohesion, satisfaction and commitment to team goals. The reliance on digital technologies to communicate and collaborate with team members makes connecting and building relationships in addition to establishing trust more challenging, making the management of virtual teams even more difficult (Liao, 2017; Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017).

2.3 Remote Working and Leadership Implications

Remote working in this study refers to the flexible working arrangements whereby workers, with prior planning, could on occasion work from remote locations that is not close to their offices whereby they have no physical contact with co-workers but could communicate with them through technology (Wang et al., 2021). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, remote working was not a widely implemented practice and mainly referred to workers voluntarily working from home or for a specific reason, but it remained occasional, infrequent and only practiced by a select few in some organisations (Wang et al., 2021; Waizenegger et al., 2020).

2.3.1 Remote Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Not only did the COVID-19 pandemic change the world and the way people and organisations operate rather abruptly, but organisations had to navigate new challenges that required swift change and adaptability to survive as a result (Contreras et al., 2020). As working remotely became a necessity to facilitate social distancing due to the onset of the pandemic it also impacted working methods significantly that required effective virtual leadership to unite and lead virtual teams in remaining focused on achieving common organisational goals which became the mainstay of business continuity and survival (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Contreras et al., 2020). However, this adaptation significantly impacted the relationships between workers and organisations and required new leadership practices as remote work can lead to feelings of isolation, disconnection and progressive demotivation which negatively influences performance as support from colleagues and supervisors is not as readily accessible as it would be when physically present in the office (Contreras et al., 2020).

In addition, the enforced lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly changed the nature of work for many as workers and leaders not only had little remote working experience but also had to adjust to new ways of working through unfamiliar technological platforms and practices they were not prepared for while simultaneously adapting to non-conducive work spaces (Wang et al., 2021; Waizenegger et al., 2020). In addition to unpreparedness and inexperience, remote working during the pandemic had been coupled with unintended outcomes such as

work-home interference, added stress of managing households, more so for women as women bear the child minding and household responsibilities more so than men which increases the dual role conflict woman experience in the workplace, particularly those who work from home (Waizenegger et al., 2020; Kantamneni, 2020). In addition, remote working during the pandemic led to ineffective communication, feelings of isolation and loneliness, procrastination and general fatigue related to constant online connectivity (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Not only did the pandemic change traditional team and leadership dynamics rather quickly, but it also had turned many face-to-face, or traditional teams, into virtual teams overnight.

2.3.2 Virtual Leadership

Much like traditional leadership, virtual leadership is seen as a process of influence mediated by technology, or digital platforms, to inspire a change in the views, thinking and behaviours among individuals of groups in organisations (Avolio et al., 2014). In order for virtual teams to remain a competitive advantage, leaders of virtual teams have the responsibility to keep abreast of the latest tools and technology that constantly change (Mehtab et al., 2017). Thus, the role of leaders in virtual teams is to enable working conditions firstly by providing the technical and organisational support, but more importantly to motivate team members and influence performance and actions towards the common goal, a situation which Contreras et al. (2020) posit requires a different type of leadership to trust their team's abilities to fulfil their duties to the same extent as they would have done in-person. However, leaders in this context need to be cognisant of the disadvantages of virtual working environments which can lead to information and e-mail overload, weakening relationships with others, reduced accountability in teams, lower trust, lack of skills to navigate online tools and an ineptitude to influence change (Contreras et al., 2020).

Although leaders of virtual teams need to be more proactive in creating an environment that promotes the adoption of information technology (Avolio et al, 2014), leaders need to be weary that employees are not exploited by virtue of the 'always on' culture that encroaches into the home and domestic lives of their team members and therefore adopting traditional leadership practices in the virtual environment is complicated (Contreras et al., 2020). In addition, due to the

prevalence of mobile phones, leaders and team members are constantly in contact which leads to distractions, interruptions and multi-tasking (Avolio et al., 2014). Importantly, virtual leadership requires the ability to cope with complexity and often paradoxical demands yet maintaining some form of virtual presence to minimise feelings of isolation and maintain a sense of connectedness with members (Contreras et al., 2020). Equally, leaders play a pivotal role in influencing how teams handle obstacles and adapt to change and manage burdensome technological demands that add to performance issues, stress, superficial relationships and reduce social cohesion (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Avolio et al., 2014).

As previously mentioned, it is well known that virtual teams are more difficult to lead as opposed to traditional teams, requiring more time, greater co-ordination efforts, enhanced facilitation of processes in addition to relationship and trust building requirements (Liao, 2017). Although traditional teams today also rely heavily on digital technologies to communicate and collaborate, face-to-face interactions have become intertwined with virtual relationships (Choi & Cho, 2019). However, factors that make traditional teams effective may not always apply or are considerably less effective in virtual team settings and the benefits of virtual teams are based on the presumption that they are indeed managed well (Liao, 2017; Alsharo et al., 2017).

Virtual teams create various leadership challenges (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002) as more traditional and hierarchical leadership approaches may be disadvantageous in virtual team settings due to lack of physical interactions and asynchronous nature of work and communication (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Leaders of virtual teams consequently have less influence on a team and have less information regarding their progress toward desired outcomes and general functioning (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). Equally challenging, leaders of virtual teams struggle to develop effective practices for managing conflict across space and time, motivation of team members, monitoring performance, and building trust and team unity (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). Moreover, effective leaders are evaluated by their teams as 'being present' within the virtual environment as social presence fosters group cohesion and engagement in virtual settings where non-verbal communication cues are lost (Avolio et al., 2014). Thus, it is evident that leaders play a pivotal role in the functioning of virtual teams (Liao, 2017) and that the digital shift of work makes leadership effectiveness even more critical to team performance (Larson & DeChurch, 2020).

2.4 Leadership, Leadership Effectiveness, and Leadership Identity

Leadership, broadly defined, encapsulates the ability to influence a group of people in the direction of a particular goal that drives an organisations' mission and objectives (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018) and as a result, the actions of leaders may have a direct effect on the performance of organisations, and consequently their teams due to their place in their groups (Giessner, Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2009). As the nature of work has increasingly shifted from production to knowledge and service based work (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002) teams remain the essential building blocks of knowledge-based organisations (Alaiad et al., 2019).

Not only has digital technologies affected the nature of teamwork (Larson & DeChurch, 2020), but it has significant implications for leadership functionality. As working remotely for many knowledge workers has become the 'new normal', the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the commencement of a new working era for many traditional teams *en masse*, whereby flexible, remote working arrangements and team collaboration through digital technologies has become the norm, interwoven with elements of traditional, face-to-face interactions which has new implications for those team leaders that now have to straddle both team environments (Wang et al., 2021; Waizenegger et al., 2020).

2.4.1 Leadership Effectiveness

Leadership effectiveness is one of the fundamental components that determine organisational success or failure as an effective leader is responsible for setting the direction, creating and sharing the vision, developing and executing the strategies that will achieve the long-term envisioned goals (Zeb et al., 2018). Thus, leadership effectiveness involves a leader's ability to influence others to complete these goals whereby the effectiveness of leaders can be viewed in two ways, firstly based on their actual performance or whether they are perceived, by others, as effective (Zeb et al., 2018; Vergauwe, Wille, Decuyper, & De Fruyt, 2021).

Efficacy, in the context of leadership effectiveness, is the level of confidence in someone that they can execute tasks or actions that are required to successfully deliver results or outcomes given a particular context that relies on both cognition and motivation (Norman, Avolio, & Luthans, 2010). A leader's ability to influence

others in such a way that organisational goals are achieved is therefore key (Madanchian, Hussein, Noordin & Taherdoost, 2017). Furthermore, leadership effectiveness is also largely contingent upon trust, and gaining it is imperative especially in times of uncertainty and change (Norman et al., 2010). It is further influenced by a leader's personality, behavioural styles, relationships, and perceived fairness as it relates to their decision making, especially decisions that impact followers including promotional opportunities, work assignments and allocation of resources (Van Knippenberg, 2011).

2.4.1.1 Performance, Influence and Motivation

2.4.1.1.1 Performance

Organisational performance is dependent on effective leaders as these individuals guide work towards achieving outcomes through creating vital links between people, processes and procedures (Zeb et al, 2018) whereas a lack of appropriate leadership skills may lead to performance issues (Kwiotkowska, Wolniak, Gajdzik & Gębczyńska, 2022). Leadership is one of the ways in which performance outcomes are measured both in terms of successes and failures, which either strengthens or weakens perceived leadership effectiveness in the eyes of followers and consequently their endorsement (Giessner et al., 2009) Thus, leadership effectiveness outcomes result in performance of business units, subordinates and teams (Madanchian et al., 2017).

Leaders manage performance by providing regular feedback to team members and actively coach to enhance employee engagement and retention (Rivera, Kumar & Petrucci, 2021). Feedback on performance is formalised through conducting performance reviews whereby managers evaluate and rate employees' performance, competency, skills and development retrospectively at multiple times points throughout a year, either quarterly, half yearly or annually (Rivera et al., 2021). Measurements include achievement of key performance indicators (KPIs) which monitor progress toward both individual and organisational goals and both of which is pivotal for leadership effectiveness as well as employee motivation (Lepold, Tanzer & Jiménez, 2018).

2.4.1.1.2 Influence and Motivation

Leadership effectiveness is contingent on a leader's ability to influence a group of people to get them to perform their roles that result in positive outcomes for organisations (Madanchian et al., 2017). Motivation is one such force that can influence subordinate behaviour whereby leaders use their energy in strategic ways to inspire and motivate teams by instilling a vision and directing efforts towards a common goal through encouraging teamwork built on mutual trust (Zeb et al., 2018). Notably, Herzberg's Two Factor Theory of Motivation distinguishes between motivators and hygiene factors that aid in job satisfaction, alternatively viewed as intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1959; Chiat & Panatik, 2019). Intrinsic, or motivational factors include career advancement, the work itself, achievement, and recognition whereas extrinsic or hygienic factors include compensation, working conditions and organisational policies (Chiat & Panatik, 2019). Thus, leadership effectiveness is incumbent on the motivation of others which is centred on feedback, including recognition, remuneration and incentives which are key motivational factors (Zeb et al., 2018).

2.4.1.1.3 Behaviour

In addition to their ability to influence and motivate, the effectiveness of leaders is also related to their experience, both in life and in work as well as their behavioural competencies which is an indicator of how well a leader is geared to fulfil the leadership function, of which achieving outcomes is at the heart of effectiveness (Truninger, Ruderman, Clerkin, Fernandez & Cancro, 2021). Furthermore, one of the main determinants of sustained leadership effectiveness and performance is the ability of the leader to demonstrate noticeable competency over long periods of time (Truninger et al., 2021). Simply put, a leader's effectiveness largely relates to both their demonstrated competency and ability to influence and motivate people, interlinked with perceptions of their effectiveness formed by their followers based on a history of performance (Giessner et al., 2009).

Leaders need to adopt certain behaviours to be effective, namely leading by example, inspiring others through a shared vision, act as change agents, motivate and empower others to execute strategies that align with the vision and build highly

effective teams and celebrate all accomplishments (Madanchian et al., 2017; Zeb et al., 2018). Followership is hinged on trust and development of trust requires leaders to recognise that they are role models and ought to behave as such by setting personal examples of attitude, manners, performance and working relationships and be effective communicators (Zeb et al., 2018). Importantly, as change agents, leaders are required to encourage the adoption of new skills and abilities needed in their organisations to deliver results and achieve long-term goals (Zeb et al., 2018).

2.4.2 Leadership Identity

Current theories highlight how essential having a good leader identity is in not only developing leadership skills but also for general leadership functionality (Kwok et al., 2018). Leadership identity thus plays an important role in a leader's perceived effectiveness, particularly the degree to whether or not a leader is perceived to embody the group's identity, or group prototypicality, that not only induces trust in their followers but also their openness to be influenced which may be mediated by context (Van Knippenberg, 2011; Thambusamy & Bekiroğulları, 2020). Group memberships, so to speak, have implications for the formation of identities, a lens through which one sees themselves and others, and leaders are therefore seen to be more effective the more they are deemed prototypical by members which is also dependent on whether or not they are seen to be pursuing the groups best interests (Van Knippenberg, 2011). Thus, understanding identities is important in understanding leadership effectiveness as these two constructs of leadership are so interlinked.

To reiterate, it is important to note that identity provides guidance in terms of how leaders should behave in order to be perceived as a leader, and the more prototypical their behaviour in context of the group, the more follower endorsement they would gain (Giessner et al., 2009). This is key, especially in times of turmoil or change, such as the business disruption brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby leaders who affirm the identity of the group would gain more trust and followership than those that deviate from it (Giessner et al., 2009). Not only would their behaviour influence others, but the more attention a leader pays to their identity and particularly the extent to which they view themselves as leaders, the more they will act accordingly (Kwok et al., 2018). Importantly, the way a leader takes action and communicates with their

teams, especially during turbulent times, could influence trust positively when done well, but negatively when not (Norman et al., 2010).

At the same time, shifts in identities can occur, which happens in tandem with the progression of leadership knowledge structures as well as changes in social processes that demand answers to key questions of self, namely, 'Who am I in this case?' and 'What should I do next?' (Epitropaki, Kark, Mainemelis & Lord, 2017). For this reason it is important to understand how leaders saw themselves and how their views-of-self emerged and evolved through these ongoing leader-follower interactions in this virtual context as identities are co-constructed and either accepted or rejected by others which ultimately drives leadership behaviour and actions, especially if under threat. This in turn could have negative consequences such as decreased performance and worst case, deliberate sabotage against attempts of organisational change if indeed threatened (Epitropaki et al., 2017).

2.5 Paradoxical Virtual Leadership

Thus far, it has been established that leaders play a crucial role in the functioning of teams to help them deal with challenges in order to deliver results in a particular working environment, of which, virtuality has been seen to lessen the relational dynamics impacting team performance (Puranova & Kenda, 2018; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Paradoxes are widespread within organisations, contradictory yet interrelated components that when considered in isolation make sense, but appear contradictory when contrasted, yet not much is known about how leaders simultaneously manage multiple paradoxes (Pearce et al., 2019; Puranova & Kenda, 2018). Contradictory yet interdependent forces are at play when leading others, and leaders are increasingly pressured to manage paradoxical tensions seen between formal, hierarchical positions and transformational approaches of empowerment and shared leadership, such as control and autonomy, coordination and asynchronous work, uniformity and individualism to mention a few (Pearce et al., 2019; Puranova & Kenda, 2018; Waldman, Putnam, Miron-Spektor & Siegel, 2019). Similarly, as the behaviours of leaders are the primary mechanism for conveying leadership, effective leaders display behavioural flexibility alternating between a variety of paradoxical leadership styles dependent on the context, such as directive leadership to participative or transactional to transformational (Avolio et al., 2014).

By adopting a paradox lens, Purnova and Kenda (2018) view paradoxical tensions leaders face as both challenges and opportunities, especially within a virtual context. Their proposed virtual paradox leadership model, the theoretical lens through which this study is viewed, fuses the paradox theory with leadership to demonstrate how the features of virtual environments and paradoxical tensions push leaders to blend various, even conflicting leadership traits, behaviours and functioning that is unique to virtual contexts. The authors further argue that developing a paradoxical mindset is a new leadership competency and that embracing paradoxes can lead to positive outcomes and greater performance through a conscious effort to engage in the right balance of a variety of behaviours or styles and not choosing one above another (Pearce et al., 2019).

CHAPTER 3: Research Questions

3.1 Introduction

As remote working was not as prolific before the pandemic as was at the time of this study (Waizenegger et al., 2020), the following research questions were proposed to understand what influence, if any, leading traditional teams operating in a sudden virtual environment had on a leader's perceived leadership effectiveness and identity (Giessner et al., 2009):

***RQ1:** How did the enforced remote working environments of the COVID-19 pandemic influence a leader's perceived effectiveness when managing traditional teams virtually?*

***RQ2:** How did the enforced remote working environments of the COVID-19 pandemic influence a leader's perceived identity when managing traditional teams virtually?*

As the hybrid working model that blends both in-person and remote working has been predicted to become the 'new normal' (Wang et al., 2021). Thus, the third research question was aimed at understanding the individual experiences leaders had in this new unprecedented work context that was thrust upon them unexpectedly to explore what skills and requirements leaders who straddle both virtual and in-person settings would need going forward.

***RQ3:** What are the lived experiences of leaders of traditional teams and how do they straddle both virtual and traditional team settings effectively?*

CHAPTER 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the research methodology applied in this study based on the research problem identified earlier on. This section further details the rationale behind the methodological choice, including the population, sampling and measurement instrument used to gather the data as well as which quality controls were put in place to increase the reliability and validity of the study. Lastly, an explanation the study limitations are included.

4.2 Choice of Methodology

4.2.1 Purpose of Research Design

As most of the previous studies involving leadership in virtual teams were done before a global pandemic (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Waizenegger et al., 2020; Wang et al, 2021), seeking new insights from a relatively underexplored context, being traditional teams who were forced to work remotely and virtually rather unexpectedly, provided a new gap for further exploration. Thus, the aim of this study was to explore what was happening with leaders as they attempted to continue leading their teams whilst working remotely and from home (Makri & Neely, 2021) and hence a qualitative, exploratory research design was selected to conduct this study.

4.2.2 Research Philosophy

As traditional hierarchical leadership approaches have previously been found to be suboptimal for virtual team functioning (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014) and given that leadership effectiveness and identity play a critical role in team performance and outcomes (Giessner et al., 2009; Liao, 2017) further understanding of leadership dynamics in the context of traditional teams working from home due to the pandemic was required. The purpose of this study was not to predict outcomes, but rather to delve deeper into the understanding of the individual, lived experiences, paradoxes and unique viewpoints to answer the research questions under investigation (Pearce et al., 2019; Puranova & Kenda, 2018; Waldman et al., 2019). To achieve this, an

interpretivist research philosophy was best suited and adopted for this study (Tomaszewski, Zarestky & Gonzalez, 2020).

4.2.3 Research Approach

Due to the rapid change of working environments enforced by the pandemic that had altered team functioning due to the use of digital technology as the main point of engagement and collaboration (Larson & DeChurch, 2020; Waizenegger et al., 2020), the question remained as to whether the leadership requirement was different in this virtual context as opposed to more traditional settings (Alaiad et al., 2019)? Both management and organisational behaviour studies that aim to advance the current body of knowledge and to go beyond what has previously been discovered lent themselves towards inductive approaches which was derived from qualitative research, and thus the same approach used was used in this study (Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018).

4.2.4 Methodological Choice

Although qualitative research delves deeper into the lived experiences and unique viewpoints of individuals, it is subject to bias, both at the hand of the subjects interviewed as well as the researchers (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). However, to build on or even advance the body of knowledge of the topic of interest, one of the key purposes of an inductive research study, relies on asking in-depth questions about those experiences at an individual level to help explain their occurrences and derive meaning (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Thus, a mono-method design whereby a single data collection technique was most suited to achieve this in this study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.2.5 Research Strategy

The mandated lockdowns imposed by governments worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic, arguably one the twenty-first century's most iconic phenomena (Godlee, 2020), forced most people to work from home rather suddenly and unexpectedly (Waizenegger et al., 2020). This not only caught many business and leaders off guard, but gave them little warning and almost no time to prepare. Thus, the phenomenological research strategy was used in this study as it not only focused on

the essence of lived experiences, but also aimed at capturing the intimate details, particularly the 'what' people experienced and 'how' they experienced or participated in a particular phenomenon (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). As a phenomenological approach aims to explain what happened or what influenced people's choices, in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted to gather data (Tomaszewski et al., 2020), thus further supporting this study's research design and methodological choices.

4.2.6 Time Horizon

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a particular point in point in time and this was a cross-sectional study as data was collected from various individuals at a single point in time, representing a "snapshot" of this group of individuals chosen from a relevant population in relation to the research topic (Wang & Cheng, 2020). As the unique views and lived experiences of leaders were explored at a time during a pandemic in this study by means of interpretivism (Tomaszewski et al., 2020), this time horizon was best suited as there was no monitoring of results or measurement of impact over a longer period of time.

4.3. Research Methodology

4.3.1 Population

To have gained relevant insights and experiences that were anticipated from the research design of this study, leaders and managers of traditional teams, particularly across the private sector of South Africa, were selected as the target population. Traditional teams in this study were identified as having mostly worked together on-site who interacted face-to-face on a regular basis prior to the pandemic (Alaiad et al., 2019). Although these leaders and teams were forced to work remotely and adapt to new ways of using technology to collaborate and engage virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they were not be considered the same as virtual teams as defined in extant literature due to origination (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). For clarification, virtual teams in previous studies have been described as teams who work over time and distance, spanning both different time zones and geographies, and are often culturally diverse whose combined efforts achieve common

organisational goals (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). It is also important to note that virtual teams in extant literature were configured purposefully and equipped to collaborate as such, operating outside of organisations and having little to no face-to-face interactions, often never meeting other team members, or leaders in person (Larson & DeChurch, 2020).

4.3.2 Unit of Analysis

Kumar (2018) states that the first step in analysing data is to define the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis stipulates 'what' and 'who' is being studied and can be done at an individual, group, or organisational level or by social artifacts or interactions (Kumar, 2018). Similarly, the research strategy, phenomenological in this study, aimed to learn from the experiences of others within the world, describing the meaning of these individual experiences, particularly what was experienced and how it was experienced to explain the essence of the phenomenon (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). Given that the purpose of this study was to gain new insights on the topic from the point of view of the leaders' individual perspectives, the unit analysis was therefore the lived experiences (what) of the leaders (who) that were managing traditional teams, working from home by virtual means.

4.3.3 Sampling Method, Selection Criteria and Size

A non-probability, purposive sampling technique, also known as selective sampling, was used for this study. As the sampling frame consisted of leaders and managers, particularly knowledge workers in private sector companies which formed part of the selection criteria including having been part of traditional teams who used to work on-site and engage face-to-face on a regular basis who were now working remotely through virtual means due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the researcher selected the sample units in a non-random way using judgement based on the relevant selection criteria identified (Sharma, 2017). Although this technique has been criticised for its tendency to be biased, it can help with generalisations (Sharma, 2017), especially if the sample units were somewhat homogenous or subject to the same phenomenon. The sample was accessed through electronic means whereby sample units selected were contacted both telephonically and via e-mail for the

research process to commence, namely having secured a date and time for data gathering.

As the aim of this qualitative study was to gain depth of understanding as opposed to breadth, theoretical saturation, which was the point at which no new information became available from any additional data collected, can be a useful guide to determine a sample size in qualitative research design (Boddy, 2016). Utilising a sample size of 12 from a fairly homogenous population is adequate to reach data saturation (Boddy, 2016), and was therefore the sample size used in this study.

4.3.4 Measurement Instrument

Conducting interviews is one of the research instruments used in qualitative studies to gain subjective insights of the perspectives and experiences of the subjects interviewed which makes it an appropriate choice for a phenomenological study (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020). Particularly, semi-structured interviews were used in this study as they were based off the development of an interview guide, see Appendix A, that consisted of open ended questions regarding the pre-defined topics derived from literature (Busetto et al., 2020), which encompassed perceived leadership effectiveness and identity (Giessner et al., 2009) in both working environments, namely before and during COVID. Having used an interview guide to conduct the 12 semi-structured interviews the researcher had more freedom to probe the interviewees for further explanation or clarification allowing them stray from the guide when appropriate to ensure depth of understanding was captured (Ricci, Lanfranchi, Lemetayer, Rotonda, Guillemin, Coste & Spitz, 2019). As the interviews were interactive, use of an interview guide was useful to avoid bias and undue influence of the researcher but allowed for unexpected topics to emerge and be explored unlike more rigid forms of data capturing (Busetto et al., 2020).

4.3.5 Data Gathering Process

Once again the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions had impacted not only the target population of this study, but seemed likely to have continued placing constraints on more traditional forms of qualitative data gathering processes (Boland, Banks, Krabbe, Lawrence, Murray, Henning & Vandenberg, 2021). Seeing as

engaging with participants face-to-face remained unlikely when planning this study, the video conferencing platform Microsoft Teams was used to conduct all 12 semi-structured interviews instead. The use of video conferencing platforms is considered a viable alternative to physical interviews and has its own advantages, it is cost-effective and has the ability to reach geographically dispersed participants easily (Boland, et al., 2021) but it also emulated the very environment of interest in this study. The average interview length lasted approximately 40 minutes and was recorded with each participant's permission. Select video conferencing platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams have transcription capabilities built in, and each interview was transcribed using the software built into the platform which assisted the interviewer in capturing the data in verbatim. Each interview was conducted using the semi-structured interview guide, see Appendix A, that covered pre-defined topics derived from literature (Busetto et al., 2020), namely perceived leadership effectiveness and identity (Giessner et al., 2009) of both working environments namely, namely before and during COVID, using open-ended, non-leading questions.

4.3.5.1 Confidentiality & Data Storage

As the identities of the participants are known to the researcher as the data was collected through semi-structured interviews, confidentiality of the interviewees and the information they provided were reiterated in both the letter of consent as well as at the beginning of the interview process. As an extra measure to ensure confidentiality, any form of identification (such as personal names or names of any organisation referred to) were removed or altered in necessary contexts in the presentation of findings having removed their identities and recognisable organisation names from the transcripts. Once the interviews were conducted, the transcripts were saved and stored electronically on the researcher's Google Drive, a dedicated location that ensured secure cloud storage.

4.3.6 Analysis Approach

To understand what influence the enforced remote working environments of the COVID-19 pandemic had on the participant's experiences when leading teams in a sudden virtual environment, the interview guide (see Appendix A) was set up to

include questions relating to their experiences before, during and post the pandemic to provide points of reference for comparison between the two team settings to determine if and how their leadership was indeed influenced.

As qualitative research aims to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon in question through exploring the beliefs, values, and experiences of those who experienced it is to explain why it occurred (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). One challenge of qualitative data, however, is the open-ended nature and text form it results in which is often more challenging to reduce for pattern identification when compared to numbers (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). To overcome this, one of the strategies commonly used to codify qualitative data is thematic analysis which was the analysis approach used in this study. Thematic analysis was used to reduce data to workable themes and emergent conclusions through a process of identifying, analysing and reporting themes or patterns that emerged (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The five steps recommended by Castleberry and Nolen (2018) was followed when conducting the thematic analysis, namely:

1. *Compilation*: data derived from the interviewees needed to be presented in a usable form, thus transcriptions from the interviews in this study were used for this step whereby the researcher spent a considerable amount of time preparing the data prior to analysis. Firstly, the researcher verified the accuracy of the auto transcriptions provided by the Microsoft Teams platform by listening to the recordings while concurrently reading the transcripts and editing words or phrases incorrectly captured by the software as well as removing words that were repeated by the nature of stuttered speech and pauses as participants reflected on the questions asked. This process was repeated for each interview and related transcript. Table 1 below outlines the total interview and transcription length of the data analysed.

Table 1: Total Interview and Transcription Length

Total no. of Interviews	Total Duration of Interviews in Minutes	Total no. of Pages of Edited Transcripts
12	461	141

2. *Disassembling*: data from the edited transcripts were imported into ATLAS.ti to be separated and regrouped by similarity, which was done by ascribing open codes, both by labelling and colour, that allowed for logical and easy sorting first by point in time, namely relevant to the time before or during COVID-19, and then relevant to each research question. A total of 202 open codes were generated, see Appendix B, which was done until data saturation had been reached by the twelfth interview, see figure 1 below, as no new codes emerged (Saunders & Lewis, 2018):

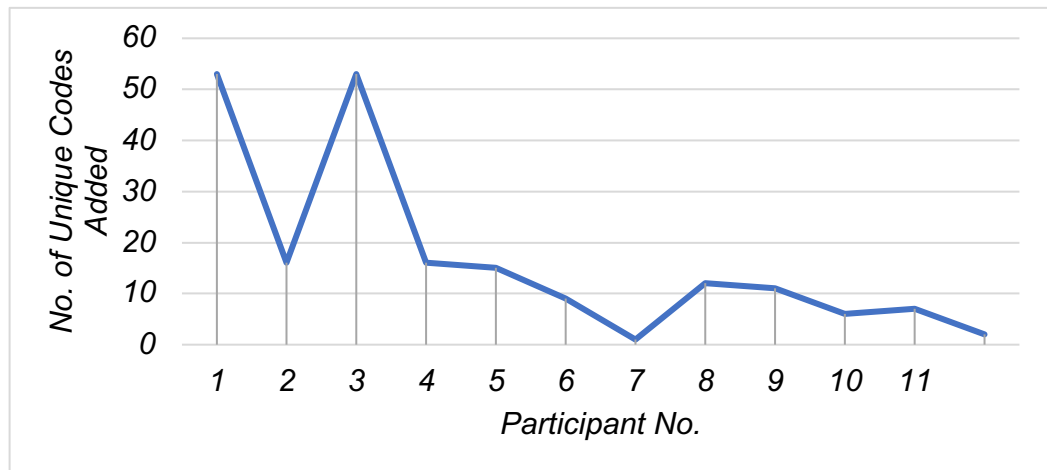


Figure 1: Data Saturation

3. *Reassembling*: Next the open codes that were connected were grouped by similarity to form category codes, counted, ranked, and mapped to create themes as patterns emerged.
4. *Interpretation*: The researcher took the themes compiled from step four and made analytical conclusions based on proliferation in response to each question posed.
5. *Concluding*: Lastly, the researcher summarised the findings in response to each research questions which is presented in the next chapter.

4.4 Quality Controls

4.4.1 Qualifying Criteria

The starting point to ensure that quality data was obtained for this study was to strictly adhere to the qualifying criteria listed when selecting the sample to ensure the right participants were interviewed (Sharma, 2017). As previously mentioned, qualifying criteria identified for this study required participants to occupy a leadership or managerial position in an organisation within the private sector of South Africa. However, the critical qualifying criterion was that the working environment of the leader or manager and their teams must have predominantly been on-site at the same location where face-to-face interactions were regular prior to the pandemic. Additionally, these leaders and teams would need to have worked remotely by virtual means since the pandemic to have been eligible to participate in this study. To further enhance the quality of data collected and overcome potential homogeneity bias was to include diverse sample units, particularly relating to different industries, gender, managerial levels, career lengths and size of teams they managed.

4.4.2 Trustworthiness

4.4.2.1 Credibility

As this is a qualitative study, trustworthiness is a key aspect in determining both the quality of the data and findings (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Firstly, Boland et al. (2021) state that consideration needs to be given to technical challenges, planning, building rapport with participants and privacy concerns to enhance the quality of data and experience of interviews when conducted online through video conferencing means. This study adhered to strict protocols to ensure that ample notice was given to meet at a time that was convenient for the participant, that their consent was obtained to participate but also for recording and transcription of the interview and that it was conducted professionally and considered a pleasant experience. Secondly, the researcher conducted a “member check” as recommended by Westbrook (1994) whereby the coding, categories and interpretations were tested informally with one of the members from whom the data was collected to further ensure credibility. The objective of obtaining feedback was to expose any misinterpretations or flaws in themes that emerged.

4.4.2.2 Confirmability

To address bias associated with qualitative research the interview guide used in this study consisted of open-ended questions that was piloted to ensure questions were not misguided or leading (Kyngäs, Kääriäinen & Elo, 2020). Although the interactive nature of the interviews allows for flexibility, permitting the researcher to follow unexpected topics that arose unplanned to reduce bias and contribute to the depth and quality of data (Busetto et al., 2020), each interview in this study flowed in a similar manner and each participant covered most of the topics as set in the interview guide. Furthermore, the transcriptions were validated by the researcher to ensure the accuracy of the data having corrected any words erroneously stated by the transcribing software due to accent or language misrepresentations, and that the intended meaning was conveyed.

4.4.2.3 Transferability

To further enhance the credibility of this study transferability methods in both the analysis and interpretation of the data were included to determine if the presentation of the findings are transferable to other contexts by means of including 'thick description' of the sample (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Providing detailed descriptions of non-verbal behaviour and associated meaning or significance of the finer details as opposed to solely relying on the use of verbal data helped achieve this, in addition direct quotations and excerpts have been included under themes identified (Amin, Nørgaard, Cavaco, Witry, Hillman, Cernasev & Desselle, 2020). Thus, the researcher noted rich contextual symbols during each interview regarding observations and meaning relating to the setting, tone, body language and facial expressions to substantiate findings presented in the next chapter.

4.5 Limitations

Although quality controls were put in place to address reliability and credibility of findings, this study is subject to the same limitations of most qualitative research, namely selection and information bias based on the purposive sampling technique utilised as the perceptions and experiences of participants selected by the researcher were subjective (Tomaszewski et al., 2020; Sharma, 2017). Furthermore, qualitative research is not intended to test relationships between variables or pre-

existing theory and thus findings cannot be generalised to broader populations and it also does not explain causation (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

However, as a combination of remote and virtual work is here to stay to some extent (Wang et al., 2021) as organisations and employees find their ideal balance, the findings of this study can be transferred to leaders and managers of teams whose work can be conducted remotely irrespective of industry or context. One limiting factor is whether physical presence is required to complete work related tasks, such as picking and packing in logistics centres for example, or if teams are bound to offices to use specialised equipment or access data, these findings are then not transferable to those working dynamics. Lastly, the context of this study, that is remote working during a pandemic, represents a snapshot in time and it is unknown to what extent the experiences and views provided by participants will remain relevant to future working environments as COVID-19 restrictions have come to an end and organisations formalise their remote working policies.

CHAPTER 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to gain new insights as to the individual experiences leaders had when forced to lead their teams who were originally traditional, on-site teams that engaged face-to-face regularly in a new and unprecedented context of working from home using virtual means as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of particular interest was to explore if and how they had to adapt their leadership approaches and if this new environment influenced their leadership identity. Thus, this chapter presents the key findings derived from the data that were gathered from 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Before the analysis of the data is presented, an overview of the sample is provided after which the presentation of the findings which have been organised to address each research question as outlined in chapter 3.

5.2 Description of the Sample

The sample consisted of 12 knowledge workers from a wide range of industries including e-commerce, healthcare, banking, insurance, and hospitality within the private sector of South Africa that mainly worked on-site and engaged face-to-face with their teams on a regular basis prior to the pandemic. The participants had varying number of years' experience managing teams that ranged between 5- and 20-years across various levels of management, including middle, senior, and executive. Table 2 below outlines additional information about the sample, including gender; position; size of their respective teams; current split between face-to-face and online engagement when conducting their daily work. The average split of virtual work at the time of this study was as high as 80% even though COVID-19 restrictions had ended at the time the data was collected.

Table 2: Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Industry	Title	Managerial Level	No. of Years Managing Teams	Size of Current Team	Current Split between Face-to-face vs. Online
1	Female	e-Commerce	Equity Compensation Manager	Middle	15+	8	30/70
2	Female	Healthcare: Medical Devices	Marketing Executive	Executive	6+	8	30/70
3	Female	Healthcare: Medical Devices	General Manager	Executive	13+	48	90/10
4	Female	Healthcare: Logistics	Head of Operational Finance	Senior	20+	4	90/10
5	Female	Pharmaceutical	General Manager	Senior	22+	13	30/70
6	Female	Advertising	CEO	Executive	20+	12	50/50
7	Male	Financial Services	CIO	Executive	8+	12	5/95
8	Male	Pharmaceutical: Animal Health	Head of Technical	Senior	6+	7	10/90
9	Female	Banking	Lead: Idea Harvesting	Middle	10+	7	20/80
10	Male	Insurance	Head of Technical	Senior	5+	4	20/80
11	Male	Banking	Lead Architect	Middle		8	1/99
12	Male	Hospitality	Group HR Manager	Executive	20+	2	50/50

The researcher used 'thick description' to note contextual cues and other signals whilst conducting the interviews. Most participants were conducting the interviews from home whereas the remaining participants were either at their office or in transit, one participant was in a car whilst conducting the interview off their mobile phone. In addition, only half the participants had disguised their backgrounds to conceal their actual surroundings either by using the blurring effect whereas 3 participants had opted for graphical backgrounds, one was a lounge area of a home which was not theirs, one was textured yet purple coloured background from the Pantone® brand themed 'colour of the year' and only one participant had an organisational themed background displaying their logo and iconography related to their service offering.

5.3 Research Findings

Given that remote working was not as prolific before the pandemic as it is currently (Wang et al., 2021 & Waizenegger et al., 2020), each research question aimed to understand if the sudden change in working environments influenced a leader's perceived effectiveness and identity by asking participants about their experiences in both working environments, namely before and during COVID and are thus included in the findings to illustrate shifts by means of comparison.

5.3.1 Research Question 1

How did the enforced remote working environments of the COVID-19 pandemic influence a leader's perceived effectiveness when managing traditional teams virtually?

Six key themes, namely 'Perceptions of Performance'; 'Meaningful Work and Support as Motivators'; 'Servant Leadership'; 'The Connection Paradox'; 'Trust and Flexibility' and 'Virtuality Impacts Influence' emerged from leaders' experiences and perceptions of their effectiveness and are presented below:

5.3.1.1 Perceptions of Performance

As performance is at the heart of leadership effectiveness, it was important to understand how performance was influenced as it is fundamentally what leaders are

responsible for. Firstly, performance was influenced by people adjusting to the new way of working which heightened their inherent work ethics, namely contributors continued to contribute, and takers continued to take advantage due to the reduced visibility:

“It’s the same as with any situation. The usual suspects who want to float and drift along, just found more platforms to float and drift along, and the usual people who wanted to contribute and figure things out and add value did so to a greater extent. So, I think it exacerbated the known like, strengths and weaknesses in different areas” (Participant 3)

This disparity in performance by different types of people became evident and started to create a perception of unfairness of contribution to performance as one participant put it:

“Because you had different personalities you had to manage, fairness had now gone out the waters. So I think there was a lot of between peers [talking about] unfairness because those people who are really hard planners put a lot more time in, and those who had leniency to play with the work environment didn’t, and it also created a sense of, I won’t say unfairness, [but] the one’s working harder than the other one... The measurements pretty much stayed the same. KPIs [and] achieving projects and timelines” (Participant 2)

This disparity of input at an individual level was seemingly easier to assess and manage in face-to-face environments where efforts were more openly visible, and it was easier for leaders to intervene:

“But I think in terms of the visibility of people, it was much easier to assess if people were or present and working. But in terms of being output driven, I don’t think there was a big change. I mean we’ve got annual targets that we set, we’ve got specific output items that we need to get resolved. I think the only challenge before the pandemic was [if] someone was not in the office and not physically present [it was] easier to discipline that person because they were physically present. In an online environment it became more challenging to know and assess if someone is actually present and doing their

work and fulfilling their hours versus just ticking the boxes and making sure that they survive” (Participant 4)

For some leaders it became more challenging to adhere to original business objectives and consequently predict new outcomes as industries were disrupted due to the COVID-19 restrictions that influenced performance:

“Look, first of all the financials needed to be adjusted accordingly to make it still a stretch but a more fair perspective and getting the teams buy-in for that and believing that still can be done was very important to lead the way and also in the initial phases. And as [the] months went by we could see the impact was actually not as bad as we predicted” (Participant 5)

Moreover, the time frame of the influence on performance was also unknown as this participant highlighted:

“Yeah, a lot of measures had to change. It was more challenging because the outputs weren't necessarily as clear [as] in the previous environment, there were a lot of knowns that you could expect and sort of dictate [that is] required for the role. And in this [new] environment, there were a lot of unknowns about what the specifics of the outputs would be like, and especially because the time frame of how long COVID would continue wasn't clear to anyone. So at what point in time do you revert back to what was being done in the past and how long do you have to plan for the current environment and to what extent?” (Participant 3)

In like manner, measures were changed if not disregarded completely for individual performance due to the uncertainty of the operating environment and subsequent challenges to conducting business:

“Absolutely. We didn't [want to] put any more pressure on people, you know? How do you measure somebody in a very new, uncertain world, as they say, the VUCA world [volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity] that you can't measure people and it's not fair to them. You know, it's not fair to anybody to expect a manager to measure somebody, and [equally] for them

to be measured. They had to deal with all the new challenges we were all facing” (Participant 12)

5.3.1.2 Meaningful Work and Support as Motivators

The ability of a leader to motivate is a key aspect of their effectiveness that is interlinked with performance. Prior to COVID, intrinsic motivational factors, namely sharing the vision and creating an environment for people to do meaningful work were key motivational factors:

“I think the biggest motivation was having them see the bigger picture and ensuring that they're part of it. I think [what] often motivates people is when they can understand what the output is. So, it's constantly reminding them this is what we're working towards, this is the difference we can make and I think the way in which I motivated [them] is making them feel part of the team and that they [are] actually contributing to something bigger and that often really gets the motivation going if they can see it. If they don't understand [that], you lose them all along the way” (Participant 2)

Creating value in an environment where the work itself becomes rewarding contributed to motivation:

“I would say that I've always tried to motivate people by creating an environment where they can do meaningful work and create value because I think intrinsically, that's what most people are looking for. So that would really be the overarching philosophy that I have and I've always felt that if you can create that kind of environment then the work itself becomes rewarding because you [are] self-fulfilling in a way. So primarily through the type of environment that I tried to set and the tone that I tried to set” (Participant 3)

Ensuring the team understood the nature of their contribution and how their role fits into the overarching organisation inherently motivated individuals:

“For me it's always that you want to have someone understand why they're doing something. For me it's always very important that someone

understands why they're doing it. If they understand the importance of the work that they're doing then it should inherently motivate someone to do that and also where we fit into the organisation as a whole. What the role does, not just the importance but the role of the department” (Participant 1)

During COVID however, providing the necessary emotional and organisational support became the overarching intrinsic motivational force that kept people going:

“To make sure that everyone is happy and the environment at home [was] a workable solution. So for example, the one guy’s girlfriend was in Cape Town at the time when lockdown happened and [he] would have been stuck all alone in his flat and I persuaded him to go fly to Cape Town and do the lockdown down there which he still refers to now as [having been] a great move... and also just being sensitive to what they're going through personally through the whole thing, be it sending care packages to keep people feeling engaged to an extent, and loved - I think that was successful” (Participant 10)

Some leaders introduced wellness programs to provide the necessary support for those in need and so that they could remain focused on the business at hand:

“I just needed to make sure that from a company perspective, they had the necessary support. We also had [an] employee assistance program where people could for free talk to psychologists, get help for their children or family members. So that really worked well to have that in place because I can't be the emotional person because in that space of COVID, it's easy to get sucked into it, so rather let the professionals deal with [making sure] that you're in the right mindset so that we can focus on the business” (Participant 5)

Focusing on the mental and emotional aspects that impacted individuals by providing them with skills to cope socialising helped motivate individuals:

“I think the biggest thing that actually came into play is just the emotional and the mental side of things. Especially because I had a team that had children, all of them actually are family oriented, or having babies... [so] to mentally to assist them, whether it [was] allowing them or opting for them to go to external

coaching or working with someone whether it's, for example, once every second or third week having a virgin drinks hour just [to] things to keep it light"

5.3.1.3 Servant Leadership

Serving others remained key in many of the leaders' perceived effectiveness whereby working side-by-side and helping others achieve their roles and responsibilities contributed towards this:

"For me it's more about 'let's work together', shoulder to shoulder as opposed to me instructing you. My role is to help you achieve what you need to achieve, right? To enable you to do what you need to do. It's not for you to do what I say you need to do. And so, you have a role. You have a responsibility. My role is to support you in achieving that" (Participant 1)

Furthermore, leaders availing themselves to the needs of others further contributed to effectiveness:

"and then the other component that I think has always assisted me in being in effective leader is that I've always tried to make myself available to other people and see how I can facilitate or help with what they're prioritising or are engaged with. Whether it's for their personal, career objectives or whether it's for a business goal or a business objective. But [I] always try to see in what way I can lend a hand or help or guide or whatever the requirement is from the individual" (Participant 3)

For teams that worked in risky environments during COVID, prioritising team safety and providing the necessary support and reassurance from leaders was effective in ultimately reverting back to business focus:

"Because people went through different emotions in COVID, especially for us that worked in the hospital environment, you daily had either friends affected or your customers being really affected badly by the whole situation. So, first of all [ensuring] the safety of the team is priority, making sure whoever gets exposed or is sick does have additional support. So, it was really making

everyone feel that yes, business is important, but in the end, the safety of our employees are the most important and I think as soon as that settled, and people had that sense of reassurance with regards to not just health issues but also job employment issues. I think that was key in the initial phase of when COVID just hit, [the] transformation only [hit] when those emotions were settled, could [we] go back to really focus on the business” (Participant 5)

5.3.1.4 The Connection Paradox

As the way teams engaged and communicated was severely impacted by the enforced remote working environments this theme highlights the key findings induced from both environments, firstly before COVID and then during the pandemic. Firstly, in-person interactions were the mainstay of engagement before COVID and was a key aspect of connecting with others whereby body language was useful in communicating what words failed to:

“When you see someone face-to-face you can read their body language. You can look at their face, you can see whether they mean something or whether they’re making a joke. When someone sends you an e-mail, you don’t know in what state of mind they are. They could be in a very good state of mind, or they could actually be really struggling and you wouldn’t even know” (Participant 9)

Body language was also an effective way leaders received feedback in real-time from others:

“You have that face-to-face engagement, you can judge the person’s reaction in front of you. You can have a lot more constructive conversations because you’re getting the body language [and] feedback and you can basically understand where the person’s coming from” (Participant 11)

Importantly, the energy in office environments assisted leaders in sensing the sentiment of their teams or if individuals needed help or if they needed to intervene:

“The thing is, you know, it's almost like when you go to the office you can feel the energy, right? You can feel if someone sad or negative [and you can] do something. Get a cup of coffee for everyone or something and just motivate them [by] just physically being there” (Participant 1)

Subsequently, the shift to remote and virtual work due to the pandemic was not only unfamiliar but it hampered leaders' and their team's ability to engage and connect versus in-person:

“And then obviously just the fact of not being in physical relation to each other because at that stage having a virtual call like this was totally surreal. I would say that no one was used to that. And so, you couldn't necessarily communicate [with] that same level of intensity of emotion and just human engagement through this platform as what you could do in person. So that was the negative component. And I think that was internal as well as external to customers. It was just not the same” (Participant 3)

The virtual ways of working resulted in teams disconnecting from each other and organic collaboration fell by the wayside as the informal, unplanned interactions that occurred in office environments were not replicated in virtual settings:

“I think on the negative side we did disconnect quite a bit in the work context in terms of we [got] stuff done and knowledge sharing and the things that [happen] in [the] office, you just sit around and you hear people and you can just learn from hearing people or you can hear someone saying [they] have a problem and you could say ‘I know the answer to this’. So we lost a lot of those type of things and that's what we're trying to get back today” (Participant 11)

Getting teams to engage in a virtual environment and a leader's ability to effectively communicate was hampered due to a lack of engagement and absence of non-verbal communication:

“It's a lot easier in person for me to get a message across then through a screen or through writing because you have the added benefit of body

language and bickering and jokes and all of that... [now] you need to repeat stuff a lot more because people don't actually engage. The main thing would be that convincing or getting a message across [is] a lot easier in person than virtually" (Participant 10)

However, although most participants cited a loss of connection due to the virtual ways of working, the requirement of leaders to attend to the mental and emotional states of their teams in the height of the pandemic resulted in them getting to know their teams on a deeper level, better than before:

"So I think I got to learn a lot about my team. You'd hear [chatter] in the background and you'll understand, OK, this one has two children or the husband is sick, or [similar] types of things. So I really got to know my team a lot better, more in their personal space than I would generally know when I'm in office" (Participant 11)

Frequent contact with team members about general states of well-being and not work resulted in higher engagement for some leaders:

"I have frequent contact sessions and it's not about work, it's about how the person is doing. I don't need to know [every] detail about your life, but for me [its] just about 'How are you doing mentally? Are you OK? Where do you need support or are you happy? Are you engaged with what you do?' And I'm privileged - I've got the highest engagement scores in the affiliate for my team" (Participant 8)

Similarly, prior to the pandemic work relationships were more transactional, whereby relationships deepened among teams during the pandemic:

"Well, I think the emotional support that the team could give each other, we all started becoming more like friends than colleagues which for me personally, I have my friends and then I have my colleagues and I don't really mix the two, but we really became like family" (Participant 9)

5.3.1.5 Trust and Flexibility

Leadership style is one aspect that influences a leader's perceived effectiveness and the majority participants mentioned that their inherent styles or approaches did not change, but rather strengthened due to the need to adapt to the new working environment:

"I think fundamentally a lot of my leadership philosophy has stayed the same because I think a lot of it was actually developed in my own experiences of good and bad leadership and environments where I felt I thrived and was engaged and environments where [I] felt less like that. However, I've probably become more flexible in my views that people can manage fairly effectively in highly flexible working arrangements and maybe I am more tolerant to change than maybe what I would have thought in the past. That's probably one of the fundamental beliefs that have changed for me. But I wouldn't say that my leadership approach has necessarily changed" (Participant 3)

"It strengthened just because I think the way of working in [the] pandemic has opened our eyes to a lot of things - we've had to adapt to change and that's everything from learning [to] how new systems work. If I [was to] say that I wasn't influenced, it would be a lie. I've had to adapt and it definitely did mould the way in which we do things, you [are] forced to [adapt]" (Participant 2)

The tools and platforms used to conduct work remotely and virtually assisted in enhancing trust whereby leaders could focus on outcomes as opposed to monitoring inputs:

"I would say strengthened because now we've got more tools available and that reluctance to trust people to do things remotely, to have people work from home has dissipated because we had to, right? So, it wasn't whether I trusted you or not, you [had to] focus more on [the] outcome. You need to be more intentional about certain things" (Participant 1)

As the known working environments were dramatically altered, adapting to change required flexibility of both themselves as leaders and their teams to work under stressful circumstances and re-establish the new ways of working:

*“I believe in giving people flexibility in doing things and empowering and support so I haven't changed much to be honest in how I work with people”
(Participant 8)*

*“Having a flexible approach of not 9-5 strictly, but as long as the work gets done when you get it done, that's fine. If I can't immediately reach you that's also fine but just indicate when you not at your computer [or] in front of it”
(Participant 10)*

“I think being flexible was quite a strong component of success in that environment. The thing is that everything was new to everyone, and I think we all had to re-establish how to do what we did [on] that platform and that required a lot of flexibility” (Participant 3)

5.3.1.6 Virtuality Impacts Influence

Interlinked with performance and motivation is a leader's ability to influence which is another key interrelated aspect of leadership effectiveness. What became evident is that loss of in-person contact hampered a leader's ability to influence either directly or indirectly by not being physically present and in proximity to what other people are doing or saying and an opportunity to step in is lost. Leaders are now required to be more intentional about exerting influence which requires more effort virtually than in-person:

“In an office environment, and it really depends on the nature of the business, you often have more informal conversations. [You] have different meetings with different people where you overhear conversations [and] you have the ability to influence things because you are party to certain conversations that you might not always be on online because online you have to call someone. You don't just get to pass someone. So your ability to influence things

informally or in a relational networking way is hampered a lot in this kind of working environment” (Participant 1)

“I'm quite outspoken [and use] my body [to] sell the goal or the concept with that energy [so] it's actually been quite challenging to do that virtually, and so it's made me more innovative in terms of bringing that passion or that motivation along. You have to sell it even harder now” (Participant 2)

However, due to the virtual shift in engagements some leaders lost their natural preference for people who were in their immediate vicinities as teams were no longer restricted to their physical location provided they operated in multi-national or international environments which in turn enhanced their realm of influence:

“The relationships across teams the IT team and shared services functions improved versus [the] very little face-to-face sessions that we've had before. And I think by means of those relationships, the influence became more predominant that you can actually now have a greater influence because you don't just interact face-to-face with your [immediate] team, but you actually interface with a lot more departments and divisions across [the business] to actually [collaborate]” (Participant 4)

Given that limited research exists on the requirements of leaders and their teams to adapt and operate in sudden virtual environments, this research question attempted to understand if the enforced working environments brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic influenced perceived leadership effectiveness when leaders had to manage traditional teams virtually. The 6 key themes that emerged and findings are summarised in table 3 below:

Table 3: Summary of Findings per Theme for Research Question 1

Research Question 1	
<i>How did the enforced remote working environments of the COVID-19 pandemic influence a leader's perceived effectiveness when managing traditional teams virtually?</i>	
Theme	Key Findings

Perceptions of Performance	Impact on performance was both people and market related. The inputs and efforts of individuals as it related to their inherent work ethic became heightened, contributors contributed more, and takers took more advantage due to the reduced visibility. In addition, the uncertainty of business continuity in a newly restricted environment forced leaders to adapt performance expectations of both their businesses and people.
Meaningful Work and Support as Motivators	Before COVID, leaders relied on intrinsic motivational factors, namely, getting buy-in to the vision and creating environments where work was meaningful where their contributions were understood to motivate their teams. During COVID emotional, mental and organisational support played a bigger role in keeping teams motivated.
Servant Leadership	Effectiveness of leaders largely relied on them availing themselves to the needs of others and focusing on the requirements of their teams for them to fulfil their primary roles and responsibilities.
The Connection Paradox	Before COVID being present and around people enabled leaders to get a sense of the well-being of their teams which could be gauged by non-verbal communication and office energy. The virtuality of remote working during COVID however, was seen to disconnect teams but frequent engagements on emotional and mental states of members resulted in teams knowing each other more personally than before.
Trust and Flexibility	Although leaders and their teams had to rapidly adapt to new ways of working and new tools and platforms used to conduct virtual work enhanced trust, it did not change their leadership approaches. It did however require leaders to be more flexible as their teams adapted and continued to work under stressful conditions and still deliver.

**Virtuality Impacts
Influence**

As leaders are no longer privy to conversations and developments that occur around them due to working virtuality, thus their ability to influence informally or relationally is hampered. Conversely, some leaders' influence strengthened due to new exposure to wider teams within business irrespective of geographic location.

5.3.2 Research Question 2

How did the enforced remote working environments of the COVID-19 pandemic influence a leader's perceived identity when managing traditional teams virtually?

As indicated in chapter 3 of this report, leadership identity plays an important role in a leader's perceived effectiveness and provides guidance as to how leaders should behave especially in turbulent times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this research question attempted to understand if there were any shifts in leaders' identities that influenced how they saw themselves that consequently altered their behaviour. Two themes emerged, namely 'Leading by Example' and 'Visibility and Identity' which are presented below:

5.3.2.1 Leading by Example

Leading by example with confidence and vulnerability was key especially in times of crisis where the future and the impact on both businesses and individuals remained unknown. Leaders themselves had to exert a sense of confidence and adapt to the new working environment amidst uncertainty and turbulence even if they too were concerned:

"That ability to put aside my own uncertainty and my own concerns about the environment that we were in and really just trying to project to the business and the team that we would find a way forward and that ultimately the business could carry on, peoples roles would be secure, that there was still an end in mind where the real world existed and that someday we would get back to it. It was like a projection of confidence that maybe I didn't necessarily

know or feel myself at the end of the day, but I think that was quite important to not come across as being anxious or worried myself in that environment” (Participant 3)

Furthermore, leaders had to put their own preferences aside and demonstrate their own willingness to adapt to the new ways of working and set an example for their teams to follow suit:

“Instead of steering away from digital options, which is not my preference, you had to force yourself to embrace it and to use what you have to try and set the example for the rest of the team... But then also there was still a lot of resistance from individuals in the team to actually communicate [with] customers digitally, so we had to set examples on how that can actually work and how you can still be connected with customers” (Participant 5)

Leading by example was also required to encourage engagement in the new virtual setting to drive behaviour and maintain performance in an uncertain time:

“I think you lead by example at the end of the day. If people see the example of the leader being online, being actively engaging in terms of different sessions, being part of the of the culture of overbooking peoples diaries and communicating with different people, I think that people saw that. And obviously making sure that the key performance measures are still achieved” (Participant 4)

Furthermore, the need for softer skills was heightened during the pandemic whereby leaders had to prioritise the emotional and mental well-being needs of their teams and acknowledge that it was important to address, a practice that has since remained:

“I'm probably checking in more from a soft skill and emotional and social perspective than I did before... We are more self-aware and also more considerate in terms of [our] time” (Participant 2)

“I am a lot more aware of the crap that people go through and the tough times. We might be out of this pandemic, but the ripple effects are still coming through with the staff members in their personal lives... I try and check in with the people that I know are more vulnerable and that have shown vulnerabilities in the past and I check and make sure that I’m talking to them and listening and trying to be that safety net, which is important in my opinion. This COVID period [has] highlighted how important people actually are to a business” (Participant 12)

“There was a lot of awareness around mental health and physical health, which I think really helped all of us and it helped me with engaging the team and making sure that we do a personal check-in before we do a work check-in and it's strange, but it's stayed. It's something that lingered a little bit longer” (Participant 9)

5.3.2.2 Visibility and Identity

Before the remote working conditions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, engagement was often informal and unplanned due to the physical proximity to others in an office environment that enabled collaboration either by sitting in open areas or having the opportunity to merely walk up to someone and discuss matters. Outside of formal meetings that occurred in meeting rooms or closed offices, collaboration and interactions occurred spontaneously in opportune moments of daily office life whilst grabbing a cup of coffee or over lunch. Being present thus allowed leaders to mostly be aware of what was happening around them:

“Because you were there, you were always aware of what was happening in the peripherals, even though you weren't part of the conversation, you were always listening with half an ear as to what's happening. So you quickly knew [whether] someone was sad or quickly knew [if] something was happening or was up, and you could quickly jump in and help” (Participant 1)

“Just having my finger on the pulse more easily on how everyone is doing, what space they're in, what they're busy with; and able to pick up when they

[are] slacking or talking too much... also being able to pick up from everyone around me what the vibe is? What's going on?" (Participant 10)

"But I also was very much aware that HR deals with people. So if I'm not showing face at the office there's a missing link, so to speak, and you miss stuff with regards to people [just] walking into the office and saying 'do you have 5 minutes?' That's invaluable for HR because you get to keep a finger on the pulse of what's going on all the time" (Participant 12)

However, the loss of the sporadic engagements due to remote work during the pandemic came at the expense of leaders' own time as they worked longer hours and put in significantly more effort to get the same sense of what their teams were working on in addition to their own requirements:

"I had to really set up time to check-in where they're at and [I had] even less time to kind of do my own admin. I felt like [the] hours had become even worse because now everything that you have to [do to] get a sense of [things] had to become a meeting or some form of a catch up as you naturally didn't have that engagement" (Participant 2)

"You don't have time to really do much work in the day, and then you literally sit after hours doing your work, and then you'll have meetings from 7:00 o'clock, and then until 8-9 I was in meetings. And that is my day and we [are] not even a global company anymore" (Participant 11)

This participant noted that the loss of visibility and not being seen by other areas of the business influenced their relevance as a leader and contributor outside their immediate team and in the broader organisation due to working remotely where sporadic interactions with other people became less:

"What was more difficult was to maintain that presence and relevance outside of our team where in the office you bump into other people, they still see you around, you remain relevant and [you] kind of know what's going on in the rest of the business. [Maintaining] that became a lot more difficult. So I feel like I may have lost a bit of market identity if I can put it that way, just people knowing you [are] around and still contributing" (Participant 10)

As previously mentioned, identity is interlinked with effectiveness and provides guidance in terms of how leaders should behave in order to be perceived as a leader, especially in times of turmoil. This research question attempted to understand if there were indeed any shifts in how leaders saw themselves and what influenced their identity when managing traditional teams virtually. The two key themes that emerged and findings are summarised in table 4 below:

Table 4: Summary of Findings per Theme for Research Question 2

Research Question 2	
<i>How did the enforced remote working environments of the COVID-19 pandemic influence a leader's perceived identity when managing traditional teams virtually?</i>	
Theme	Key Findings
Leading by Example	Leading with confidence and vulnerability was key in times of crisis and uncertainty. Leaders had to demonstrate their own adaptability to the new virtual ways of engaging to set the tone for teams to follow whilst still managing performance outcomes. Leaders had to prioritise soft skills and prioritise the emotional and mental well-being needs of their teams.
Visibility and Identity	Before COVID, engagement was often informal and unplanned due to the physical proximity to others and merely being present and visible allowed leaders to be mostly aware of what was happening around them. The subsequent shift to virtual means of engagement not only impacted leaders' own time management but diminished their presence and relevance as leaders in the wider organisation outside their immediate teams.

5.3.3 Research Question 3

What are the lived experiences of leaders of traditional teams and how do they straddle both virtual and traditional team settings effectively?

The hybrid working model that fuses both in-person and remote working is set to become the 'new normal' if not already. Thus this research question attempted to understand what it is like to be a leader in this new unprecedented context, forced and unprepared remote working conditions, to gain new insights as to the individual experiences leaders had and explore if and how they had to adapt their leadership approaches and more importantly, what skills and requirements leaders of teams who straddle both virtual and in-person settings will need.

Six key themes, namely 'Humanity in the Workplace'; 'Dual Role Tensions'; 'Virtual Slow Down'; 'Empathy and Authenticity'; 'Rules of Engagement' and 'Constant Change' emerged from the leaders' views about the future requirements of leadership which are presented below:

5.4.3.1 Humanity in the Workplace

Due to the nature of how the pandemic unfolded and the subsequent emotional toll it took on individuals saw an increase in the tolerance leaders and cultures of businesses had for the humanity of people and how interrelated work and life truly is. As there was no escaping the realities of life whilst working from home and vice versa, how teams related to each other shifted as leaders and organisations understood people were dealing with a lot which was not just work, but life in general:

"You would not just connect with the person work related but connect with them informally and when you start to meeting [you] don't just fall into work, [you] just have a bit of a human chat or admire the cat that's walking over the screen or something like that. So, a lot of how we relate to people changed, sharing the challenges with families and kids or a child screaming and all of a sudden there was a lot more tolerance for being human around those things. People had a lot of fears around 'what's going to happen with my job?' so there was a need to engage on those kind of emotional levels but I think it was the nature of the pandemic... now suddenly we're all in the same environment, right? Like I said, that human factor crept into more meetings"
(Participant 1)

Organisations and leaders had to become more lenient in their expectations of deliverables as home life and work life became more blended than ever before:

“It's about dealing with individuals in their home life because you get different personalities and some people, the children are running around, they crying in the background and it's just, [if you] don't understand, [even though] you have an urgent meeting and decision to make, but the child's crying in the background, [you have to say] OK, cool, go sort that out” (Participant 11)

In addition to the daily responsibilities of home life, the pandemic claimed lives of loved ones which added to the emotional toll many were experiencing whilst still showing up for work under tough conditions:

“I think the emotional side of COVID and just the psychological effects of it on people were much larger than anything else... But I think it was just to the max, so many more people passing away, so many more friends, parents and friends and family members passing away so having to deal with all of that devastation and death and emotional struggles and then on top of that, having to still show up every day and do your work; I think that was difficult for the team. And most of us are pretty resilient but if you are facing four different people dying in one week, I think that makes it difficult.... So we just had to be very relaxed and give people an opportunity to take time off” (Participant 9)

5.3.3.2 Dual Role Tensions

As per the previous theme, work-life fusion was heightened as a result of the pandemic as schools shut, partners had to share work spaces at home in addition to juggling work responsibilities. Keeping people focused on their work and creating new routines amidst many distractions was challenging for most, including leaders:

“The additional home responsibilities and people trying to juggle managing their very confined personal life and direct needs, be it food or shopping or anything that was so challenging to do with what they're to do from a work perspective. All of a sudden people were looking after kids and people with partners were also probably working from home, and they had to somehow

juggle those responsibilities with the outputs that were required of them. So that was quite a negative component” (Participant 3)

Individuals increasingly filled known ‘down-time’ such as commuting to and from the office with either more home or more work responsibilities:

“The time in adjusting between home life and work life, like when you travel between the two [you are] able to ease into each one. So you think you should have more time in a day because you’re not commuting, but you actually just fill the time doing more house stuff, or more work stuff. So that’s been difficult and continues to be difficult” (Participant 10)

As boundaries became more blurred, it was important for individuals to establish new routines to manage home and work responsibilities effectively:

“The biggest challenge [for] my team was that they all had families and I think they really actually battled to get the flow of that and getting [into] a routine where in the past they would come to the office and their children would be elsewhere... I think that was a big challenge [was] understanding how did they do that work now [with] doing it in the home environment? And I think more so for those with kids” (Participant 2)

5.3.3.3 Virtual Slow Down

The reliance on virtual meetings to engage with others resulted in a general slowdown of collaboration whereby quick and informal conversations that would naturally occur in an office setting had to be scheduled online that resulted in people’s calendars being filled which resulted in delayed feedback or decision making and ultimately less time to manage other outputs in-between dozens of meetings:

“It went from 60% meetings to 150% meetings... I think it was really challenging in the sense where you could no more just walk up to someone and have a quick two-minute conversation. You have to specifically look at a diary to find a space to actually talk to someone... Let’s look at their diary

which is packed because everyone has the same issue. Now I can't just walk up to someone, I have to book a session” (Participant 11)

“So, lots of meetings because there was no other way to engage with everyone... And then the fact that everything had to be scheduled, basically your whole life become a calendar event. So you were on and then you were off and then you were on and then you were off [meetings], and then the in-between bits became difficult to manage in terms of your momentum on other outputs that weren't necessarily in person, whereas normally for me there's a natural flow between your in-person engagement and working on whatever you work on. But this ‘diarisation’ and ‘calendarisation’ of things made that much more challenging” (Participant 3)

The industries where face-to-face customer interactions were an important part of conducting business that was halted due to the restrictions imposed by the lockdowns, individuals now had to account for their time and fill their days in other ways, namely days filled with meetings became an expectation:

“What makes it difficult to have to the focus and follow up that you actually need in the work environment where you could just go to someone and say this is what I need. Now you wait until the next Teams meeting, so it definitely slowed down the way we led the teams... we filled our calendars with some must-have, but also some nice-to-have to fill the time, [but] your time can be better spent, but it was more an implication of expectations to fill a day when you can't go out and see each other” (Participant 5)

5.3.3.4 Empathy and Authenticity

When participants were asked about their views about what skills and requirements leaders of teams who straddle both virtual and in-person settings would need based on their recent lived experiences, leading with authenticity came through strongly as there is no longer a separation of ‘work self’ and ‘home self’ for both leaders and their teams and that empathy towards people and their home situations will be required to manage team members virtually:

“I think for a lot of leaders that level of authenticity is going to be very challenging to embrace. And I think it's [going to] be such a critical part of how we manage teams because how you show up as a leader dictates the tone for the rest of your organisation as well, and so if you've got staff members who are also working in that hybrid landscape, you can't have this very austere and professional persona in this platform and then your staff members [are] maybe working from a shack or something like that in a South African context, or sitting in a crowded room with eight people, for example, which is their life and their reality. And so, I think being able to be authentic and allow your teams to be authentic and actually embrace that is [going] be a new type of way of managing people. Then linked with that is that ability to be empathetic and understanding” (Participant 3)

“You need to work with people as people. Because that whole mindset of you have office and you have a home view doesn't work anymore. You have to look at a person holistically and you have to then have the people skills to address any kind of things that come about and have that flexibility to work around these type of things” (Participant 11)

In addition, leaders need to embrace physical and emotional well-being of people as it influences their ability to do the work. Team members who are struggling may need mental health support instead of performance improvement plans which requires mature and empathic leaders:

“I've always led with empathy. That's always been one of the things that's been a priority for me when it comes to my team, I [want to] make sure that they are doing well before they do the work. I think the thing that the pandemic has done is just to zoom in on that and making sure that I really prioritise that because if people are not doing well physically and emotionally, they can't perform. Leading with empathy has really been emphasised for me with this whole pandemic” (Participant 9)

5.3.3.5 Rules of Engagement

The new hybrid working model has identified some gaps or potential pitfalls that leaders and business will need to address to successfully implement policies that are best suited to their industries and business needs that is fair to all employees, qualifying which individuals can work from home if it the nature of their work allows it. Similarly, as work has successfully been conducted from home for the duration of the pandemic and after, strict return to office work also remains questionable:

“Now I've [got to] create a work from home policy and how do you qualify [who] works from home? Is it maturity or is it connectivity? Is it position in the in the company, senior versus junior? It's weird, things we never ever thought that we would ever have to worry about, but now that's something that leadership have to put in place” (Participant 12)

“Identifying that [in] a hybrid model [you are] always going to have people who are going to push things as far as they can. The other thing is consistency with all staff. The minute you're seen as favouring one and not favouring [the other], it becomes a little bit of an issue and [is] complicated in this country by a number of other layers and levels” (Participant 6)

However, not all participants agree and maintain that flexibility in policy is the way forward not only for performance but for talent attraction and retention:

“The big thing is where I think a lot of companies are going wrong [is] by instilling hard rules on [having] to be back in the office three days a week and you have to be online this time. I think that's what's caused a lot of unhappiness and just negative work environments. [You need] flexibility [and] adaptability” (Participant 10)

The need for virtual skills and the openness and ability to navigate the various digital tools and how to conduct oneself in an online environment was also mentioned as a key requirement for leaders going forward:

“One has to be technically capable, you can't say ‘I don't know how to use Zoom, or I don't know how to use [MS] Teams’. Companies have mandated [platforms], so you need to be agile” (Participant 7)

“You need to embrace different types of digital tools. You can't just focus on [MS] Teams to create a better and engaging session, people get bored. You need to look what other digital virtual options are available. What can people learn from?” (Participant 5)

“First and foremost the ability to navigate all the new tools that we have and the ability to understand all the dos and don'ts around using it, right? Know when to put on screens, [when] not to put on cameras or that kind of stuff. That's [a] fundamental shift. If someone had to time warp from 10 years [ago] into this environment, I think they would be quite lost because you wouldn't know how to handle yourself in an online environment if you haven't been part of the change, it's very difficult to [adapt], I mean just fighting with people to get them to just put their cameras on so you can see their faces [is hard]” (Participant 1)

5.3.3.4 Constant Change

The onset of the pandemic was abrupt, and the subsequent lockdowns imposed changed many teams into virtual teams overnight whereby remote work with limited to no face-to-face interactions became the norm. However, what remains unknown is what lasting impact and tolerance of the ‘always on’ culture and its associated fatigue towards virtual engagements will be?

“The one thing that I keep thinking about is what [are] people's tolerance [going to] be like to all these challenges? For me, a huge subject that I keep thinking of and whether there's [going to] be a wave of turning away from it? When [will] people try and retract and disengage, because [just] like every other type of technology platform, it also becomes so invasive, right? ... the ‘always on’ [trend] and [wonder] what type of parameters and rules you set around it? I wonder [if] there will be a revolt against that and especially because you lose that possibility of personal connection and those impromptu

collaborative [environments] which I think can really extract value from teams when you don't have that" (Participant 3)

Also, how do leaders and teams thrive in both working environments simultaneously as movement of people either in-person or online are not always synchronised making the co-ordination of engagements more challenging? Lastly, an important point another participant raised was the question around defining remote work in the geographical sense, is it limited to one's home or will work environments become borderless? Signalling that we should not get too comfortable and that we are merely experiencing the beginning of change in the workplace and that more is still to come:

"A bit of hybrid is normal, but that's almost harder, hybrid is harder. Going hybrid means that some of people [are] in the office and some are online, and there's a whole big mishmash of [inconsistency], so it will be interesting to see what this has done to the world of work in the in the future, how different companies engage, how people form teams, how they form communication structures. I don't think we're done yet, in terms of change" (Participant 1)

"What [we] haven't covered is remote work in a sense of [are] we still talking about whether the person can leave the country or not to work in our same office? I think what we're finding is that we want people still in the country just so that we can still have those [in-person] conversations here and there. It's about figuring out that balance. How remote is remote, and what are the pros and cons?" (Participant 11)

The six key themes that emerged and findings are summarised in table 5 below:

Table 5: Summary of Findings per Theme for Research Question 3

Research Question 3	
<i>What are the lived experiences of leaders of traditional teams and how do they straddle both virtual and traditional team settings effectively?</i>	
Theme	Key Findings
Humanity in the Workplace	The emotional toll the pandemic took on individuals saw an increase in the tolerance that leaders and cultures of businesses had for the humanity of people as work and

	home lives became increasingly intertwined, thus, leaders became more lenient in their expectations of deliverables under such conditions.
Dual Role Tensions	Work-life fusion was heightened during the pandemic as most people had to juggle both home and work responsibilities. Keeping people focused on their work and creating new routines amidst many distractions was challenging in this environment.
Virtual Slowdown	The reliance on scheduled virtual meetings to engage with others resulted in a general slowdown of collaboration due to loss of quick and informal conversations that would naturally occur in an office setting resulting in delayed feedback, decision making and over-booked calendars with limited time to manage own outputs.
Empathy and Authenticity	Leaders of teams who straddle both virtual and in-person settings will need to be able to lead with authenticity as there is no longer a separation of 'work self' and 'home self' for both leaders and their teams. Team members who are struggling may need mental health support instead of performance improvement plans which requires mature and empathic leaders to work with subordinates as wholistic beings.
Rules of Engagement	Leaders will need to determine what qualifies suitability for employees to work from home and when and create policies to this extent that enables fair treatment to all employees if the nature of their work allows it. Conversely, flexibility and adaptability to new ways of working may be key requirements in attracting and retaining talent going forward. Openness and ability to navigate the various digital tools and how to conduct oneself in an online environment is an important virtual skills requirement.

Constant Change

The known world of work has been disrupted whereby optimising ways of engaging and collaboration in hybrid environments are yet to be determined as many questions regarding people's tolerance to the 'always on' culture and remote working boundaries remain unanswered.

5.3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented 14 themes that were derived from the data analysis based on the 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews that explored whether leaders had to adapt their leadership approaches in the new unexpected remote environment and to determine if it influenced their leadership identity. How their views of how their effectiveness and identity compares against what has been found in previous research will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: Discussion of Findings

6.1 Introduction

Suddenly the world and the way in which organisations and people operate within it was changed abruptly due to the rapid onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Contreras et. al, 2020). As enforced social distancing became a requirement to curb the spread of the virus, working methods were significantly altered whereby many traditional teams and leaders turned into virtual ones overnight presenting new leadership challenges (Chamakiotis et. al, 2021; Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Thus, this chapter discusses the findings of this study structured around the research questions presented in chapter 3 which aimed to understand what influence, if any, leading traditional teams operating in a sudden virtual environment had on leaders' perceived effectiveness and identity (Giessner et al., 2009) and also to explore what leadership looks like going forward as the hybrid model that fuses both in-person and virtual ways of working is here to stay (Wang et al., 2021). That being so, the findings of each research question in this study are presented in conjunction with the current literature as outlined in chapter 2 to discuss what it means for the current body of knowledge and leaders alike.

6.2 Research Question 1 Findings: Leadership Effectiveness

How did the enforced remote working environments of the COVID-19 pandemic influence a leader's perceived effectiveness when managing traditional teams virtually?

This research question was aimed at understanding if the enforced working environments brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the perceived leadership effectiveness when leaders had to manage traditional teams virtually. The findings of the 6 themes for this research question were presented in detail in section 5.3.1 and summarised in table 3.

6.2.1 Flexibility, Trust and Performance

When participants were asked about their views of what made them effective leaders in both the work settings namely traditional settings of being present in the office versus the online environment brought on by the pandemic, most participants indicated that the change in working environments did not fundamentally change their leadership approaches however, as teams were unfamiliar and unprepared to a large extent to effectively switch to remote working as a result of how quickly the pandemic and related restrictions unfolded, trust and flexibility became a heightened requirement of managing change in this context.

Although leadership effectiveness is largely contingent upon trust and gaining it is even more imperative in times of turmoil and change (Norman et al., 2010) it can be impeded by increased physical distance and limited face-to-face interactions (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Current literature suggests that it is the leader who should earn the trust of their followers (Ford et al., 2017), however the findings of this study indicate that it was rather the leaders who had to trust their teams to fulfil their functions remotely as visibility was massively reduced due to the lack of face-to-face engagements. The findings also indicate that inherent work ethics of individual team members were amplified as contributors contributed more, and takers took more advantage due reduced visibility of their managers which is why leaders having to trust their teams to do their work from home emerged as a key finding. Therefore, the findings extend current literature in that earning trust in a virtual working environment is reciprocal; it ought to be earned by both leaders and team members alike.

As the known working environments were dramatically altered, this study found that adapting to change required flexibility of both leaders and their teams to work under stressful circumstances and re-establish new ways of working very quickly. This was not only applicable to becoming familiar with new online platforms and tools that allowed virtual collaboration but extended to leaders' expectations of when work was to be conducted as members increasingly had to juggle both home and work responsibilities simultaneously. These findings confirm that business survival during the pandemic relied on the ability of organisations and leaders to adapt in order to successfully navigate change and the new challenges that it brought about seeing

as leaders play a crucial role in influencing their teams to adapt accordingly of which the use of technology to collaborate and engage virtually was of particular relevance in this context (Contreras et al., 2020; Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014).

6.2.2 Motivation

When participants of this study were asked how they motivated their teams before the onset of the pandemic, a key role of leadership interlinked with effectiveness (Contreras et al., 2020; Giessner et al., 2009), leaders said they largely relied on intrinsic motivational factors, namely obtaining buy-in from their teams into the overarching vision of the business and creating environments where the work itself was meaningful. Coupled with that, the study found that leaders motivated by ensuring their teams understood what their role was in context of the wider organisation and how they contributed to organisational outcomes.

These findings confirm that motivation remains a powerful force that influences subordinate behaviour whereby leaders strategically use their energy in ways to inspire and motivate teams by instilling a vision and directing efforts towards a common goal (Zeb et al., 2018). Thus, these findings support the literature that intrinsic, or motivational factors as per Herzberg's Two Factor Theory of Motivation, namely the work itself, indeed remains motivating (Herzberg et al., 1959; Chiat & Panatik, 2019).

However, as the new working environment was riddled with uncertainty, health, and job security concerns during the pandemic, it put into question if known factors of motivation were enough to sustain performance? The findings of this study pointed to leaders having to pay greater attention to the emotional and mental states of their teams above any other type of motivational tactic. Leaders had to spend a considerable amount of time and energy tapping into the well-being of their teams to ultimately enable performance and sustain focus within a distracting and stressful environment. This was exacerbated due to the lack of face-to-face interactions whereas before leaders could 'sense' demotivation or disengagement by merely being in regular physical contact with their teams. Thus, leadership and organisational support towards the mental well-being of teams played a bigger role

in motivation during the pandemic but required intense and deliberate effort from leaders.

These findings therefore support current literature that states that virtual teams are harder to lead as opposed to traditional teams (Liao, 2017) as they require more time and enhanced efforts by leaders to motivate and communicate due to the lack of physical interactions creating various leadership challenges (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). However, these findings extend current literature that merely acknowledges that leaders not only need to prioritise the well-being of their teams to promote general functioning (Thambusamy & Bekiroğulları, 2020; Chamakiotis, et al., 2021) but ought to be used as an additional intrinsic motivational factor going forward irrespective of working environments. Therefore, leaders need to embrace the emotional well-being of their teams as it influences their ability to perform.

6.2.3 Building Connections and Relationships

The findings of this study explained that prior to the pandemic meetings and collaboration typically occurred in the office whereby engagements were primarily face-to-face but were also of a spontaneous and informal nature. Being physically present and around other people on a regular basis, if not daily, enabled leaders to get a general sense of the not only the well-being of their teams, which could be gauged by observing non-verbal communication but also the mood of the day by noting the energy in the office. Consequently, the move to remote working practices that were enforced upon organisations that could do so to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus, hindered this ability as teams and leaders became reliant on e-mail, online meetings, and other digital means of communicating to interact thus influencing the not only the ability to connect, but also build and foster relationships.

These findings are comparable with current literature that states that virtual teams experience interpersonal challenges to a greater extent than more traditional, face-to-face teams because online tools limit the observation of non-verbal communication and other subtle cues as unplanned and impulsive engagements compared to teams that mainly engage face-to-face are less likely to occur spontaneously in a virtual environment (Feitosa et al., 2018). Furthermore, these

findings confirm similar disadvantages of virtual teams observed by Hoch & Kozlowski (2014) whereby the reliance on digital technologies to communicate and collaborate with team members makes connecting and building relationships more challenging (Liao, 2017; Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017).

Most participants in this study remarked that the virtuality of remote work and consequent lack of face-to-face engagements have led to teams becoming more disconnected accompanied by feelings of isolation and disengagement due to the lack of socialisation confirming literature that supports these disadvantages of virtual teams (Contreras et al., 2020; Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). However, the researcher was surprised to find that although most participants remarked how the virtual ways of working led to disconnection within their teams, they equally noted that working remotely and virtually resulted in them getting to know their teams more personally and on a deeper level than they have or ever would have in the traditional working environments, thus presenting an ironic situation suggesting that relationship building improved. This is in stark contradiction to current literature that states that the reliance on digital technology to communicate and collaborate makes connecting and relationship building harder in virtual teams (Liao, 2017; Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). This raises an important question as to what exactly about working virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic enabled the deepening of relationships as all the known disadvantages of virtual teams were experienced by participants in this study?

6.2.4 Ability to Influence

An additional downside to no longer interacting face-to-face on a regular basis due to the virtual working environment during the pandemic was that leaders were no longer privy to conversations and developments that would have normally occurred around them in the office on a daily basis merely by being present and therefore their ability to influence, another key contributor to leadership effectiveness (Madanchian et al., 2017), informally or relationally has been impeded as a result. This is in line with current literature that confirms that the lack of physical interactions and asynchronous nature of work and communication (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014) consequently result in leaders of virtual teams having less influence on a team and information regarding their progress toward desired outcomes and general

functioning (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). However, the findings also indicated that influence of some leaders surprisingly enhanced due to the exposure to and interactions with wider teams within organisations during the pandemic as teams were no longer restricted to local or physical teams thus contrasting current literature that posit influence of known, traditional teams might be hampered in virtual environments (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017; Contreras et al., 2020). Thus, these findings conclude that a leader's ability to influence may be hampered in virtual teams but can subsequently be enhanced if they are exposed to wider teams because of the new ways of working that are becoming increasingly normalised.

6.3 Research Question 2 Findings: Leadership Identity

How did the enforced remote working environments of the COVID-19 pandemic influence a leader's perceived identity when managing traditional teams virtually?

This research question aimed to understand if there were any shifts in participants' leadership identities that influenced how they saw themselves that consequently influenced their behaviour during the enforced working environments brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic as they managed traditional teams virtually. The findings of the 2 themes for this research question were presented in detail in section 5.3.2 and summarised in table 4 of chapter 5.

6.3.1 Leading by Example

Participants' identities, namely how they saw themselves as leaders were much less influenced by the sudden switch to virtual working methods compared to their requirements to act and behave as leaders that influenced how others perceived them as such. The findings of this study suggest that leaders had to lead by example to a greater extent during times of uncertainty whereby they had to portray both a level of confidence in believing that the pandemic and the impact thereof would eventually be resolved whilst simultaneously showing vulnerability towards the realities of the pandemic. These findings are in line with current literature that suggests identity provides guidance in terms of how leaders should behave to be perceived as a leader, especially in times of turmoil and change (Giessner et al.,

2009) particularly, these findings provide further guidance as what behaviours were appropriate in this context.

In addition, leading by example extended to other behaviours including leaders having to demonstrate their own abilities to adapt to and embrace change that assisted in setting the tone and expectations of how to utilise online tools and platforms to drive engagement and collaboration among teams in absence of face-to-face interactions which became pertinent for maintaining performance. These findings point comparatively to literature that highlight how essential having a good identity is in not only developing leadership skills but also for perceived effectiveness (Kwok et al., 2018; Van Knippenberg, 2011). Again, these findings provide further guidance as to what behaviours and skills were appropriate in this context.

6.3.2 To be Seen as a Leader

Furthermore, as the findings of this study propose that showing vulnerability was key in this context whereby leaders had to prioritise and develop their soft skills by paying more attention to the emotional and mental well-being needs of their teams which were heightened during the pandemic. This confirms current literature that suggests that leadership identity is contingent upon prototypical behaviour in the context of groups to be perceived as a leader which is positively influenced when leaders pursue the groups best interests (Giessner et al., 2009; Van Knippenberg, 2011). Thus, these findings suggest that shifts in leadership identities did not necessarily occur but rather shifts in their behaviours. In contrast to literature that states leadership identity is contingent upon displaying prototypical behaviour (Giessner et al., 2009; Van Knippenberg, 2011), participants referred to the notion of being seen or to be perceived as a leader extended beyond prototypical behaviours to that of physical presence in this context. Namely, the findings suggest that physically being seen or not being seen by indirect teams and other colleagues due to reduced visibility because of remote working, influenced participants' 'market identity' as a leader within their wider organisations, suggesting that the lack of physical presence influenced their identity as a leader more so than the embodiment of their group's identity (Van Knippenberg, 2011).

6.4 Research Question 3 Findings: Hybrid Leadership

What are the lived experiences of leaders of traditional teams and how do they straddle both virtual and traditional team settings effectively?

As the hybrid working model that combines both in-person and virtual means of working is predicted to remain and become the preferred way of working for organisations that can conduct work remotely (Wang et al., 2021) this research question aimed to understand what it is like to be a leader in this hybrid context which many leaders were unprepared for to gain new insights from their experiences and explore what skills and requirements leaders of teams who straddle both virtual and in-person settings need. The findings of the 6 themes that emerged from this research question were presented in detail in section 5.3.3 and summarised in table 5 of chapter 5.

6.4.1 A More Humane Workplace

The rapid onset of the pandemic and how quickly it unfolded caught many organisations and leaders unprepared to shift their work to virtual environments quickly and seamlessly that extended not only to the use of digital meeting tools but also hardware such as laptops and data. To curb the spread of the virus, the enforced lockdowns required non-essential businesses to shut and to work from home if they could, which extended to institutions such as schools. The findings of this study highlight the emotional toll that having to lose loved ones, job uncertainty, sharing temporary workspaces with their spouses as well general household duties whilst taking care of their children without support was stressful and took an emotional toll on most. These findings confirm recent literature that found the under preparedness and inexperience of navigating the new virtual world of work and managing unintended outcomes such as work-home interference of managing day-to-day requirements of running households an added stress (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

However, participants in this study remarked on how this traumatic experience which was not only applicable to a select few, but to people all over the world, saw leaders, teams, and business in general become more tolerant to being human in the workspace. No longer could leaders and individuals separate their 'professional

selves' at work from their 'home selves' as these became increasingly intertwined and unavoidable. As most people had to address home disruptions related to child-minding, pet care, or simply having to manage home deliveries, an increase in not only the recognition of this real working environment became evident, but leaders became more aware of individuals personal circumstances and thus more lenient of their expectations of others. Meaning outputs generated became more important than how and when people did the work as they had to constantly juggle daily priorities between home and work.

Extant literature suggests that organisations are increasingly making use of virtual teams as they can be structured around work and teams through the advancement of digital technologies without the constraints of location, work hours, and time zones (Choi & Cho, 2019) while offering increased work flexibility as well as work-life balance advantages for employees which can lead to improved job satisfaction (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Liao, 2017). Additionally, more recent literature suggests that managing work-life boundaries and prioritising the well-being of teams is set to contribute to the effective functioning of virtual teams (Thambusamy & Bekiroğulları, 2020; Chamakiotis, et al., 2021). However, more recent literature warns leaders against promoting the 'always on' culture as increased information and e-mail overload encroaches on home and domestic lives (Contreras et al., 2020). Therefore the findings of this research question extends current virtual teams literature in that the recognition, acceptance, and tolerance of others' individual circumstances contributes to the creation of a more humane workplace.

6.4.2 Empathy in Performance Management

As previous findings of this study have already indicated that leaders who straddle both virtual and in-person working environments will need to lead authentically by embracing both their home and work selves which can no longer be separated as it is more visible to others, especially online, it equally extends to their teams who are subject to the same realities. Thus, the findings suggest that team members who are experiencing performance issues may need assistance with mental health support as opposed to performance improvement plans which requires mature and empathetic leaders to recognise their team members as wholistic beings instead of mere producers of work.

Managing performance by providing regular feedback to team members by means of a formal performance review is a well-established mechanism used by leaders in organisations as reported in literature (Rivera et al., 2021). These regular reviews evaluate and rate employees' performance, competency and skills retrospectively according to achievement of predetermined key performance indicators towards both individual and organisational goals, of which failure to meet the desired metrics often times lead to performance improvement plans (Rivera et al., 2021; Lepold et al., 2018). What the findings of this study suggest is that perhaps leaders should extend performance reviews to include mental health support as the root cause of underperformance at work could be related to personal matters as opposed to lack of skill or competency, an approach which requires empathy.

6.4.3 Increased Virtual Slowdown

Findings of this study noted that there became a reliance on scheduled virtual meetings to engage with other team members and colleagues which resulted in a general slowdown of collaboration and execution of work as the lack of impromptu, convenient face-to-face means of working together was lost in the virtual setting as opposed to prior office settings resulting in disconnected teams. Not only did this delay feedback and decision making, but it also resulted in time management constraints as online diaries of leaders and decision makers became over-booked, leaving little time for them to execute their own outputs and work requirements. This was exacerbated by the need to check-in with teams regarding their mental and emotional well-being during the height of the pandemic on a more regular basis.

The reliance on digital technologies to communicate and collaborate within virtual teams has already been recognised in literature citing the increased difficulty in making connections and building relationships in addition to establishing trust, thus, contributing to increased difficulty in managing them (Liao, 2017; Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). More recently, the pandemic caught many teams unprepared to effectively work remotely, adding to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and increased procrastination (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Furthermore, recent literature has acknowledged that virtual teams experience interpersonal challenges to a greater extent than traditional, face-to-face teams especially as they rely on the use of digital tools to communicate and collaborate limiting the engagements to that of a task-

driven nature as opposed to spontaneous interactions that would naturally occur when in physical proximity to one another (Feitosa et al., 2018; Benishek & Lazzara, 2019; Liao, 2017). In addition, solely utilising virtual tools for engagement has previously been identified to increase lags in exchanges leading to frequent misinterpretation of communication, reduced team contributions and participation as well as increased disengagement due to lack of socialisation (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

Therefore, the findings of this study confirm that these virtual team disadvantages remain in place even in contexts where virtual teams have not been purposefully setup to solely work autonomously and who had existing relationships prior due to face-to-face working environments suggesting that in-person collaboration and engagement remains a key aspect of connected, functioning teams.

6.4.4 Future Considerations for the Hybrid Working Model

When participants of this study were asked about what other considerations leaders need to contemplate going forward to get the best of both virtual and in-person settings, fairness and equal treatment regarding policy making was highlighted as being a key aspect of formalising remote working. Some findings indicated that strict and standard rules ought to apply to all as leniency would be perceived as favourable treatment towards some and not others which presents leadership challenges because not all roles can be conducted remotely. Conversely, other participants warned against formalising and standardising stringent remote work policies as employees of the future workforce are seeking more flexibility and adaptability in how, when, and where they conduct their work, which could become a key requirement for attracting and retaining talent going forward as organisations aim to remain competitive. However, even though the world of work has been disrupted significantly, what remains unknown is what people's tolerance levels towards the 'always on' culture will be in context of the home life versus work life and what the acceptable boundaries will be in this regard that is mutually beneficial for both organisations and individuals.

Lastly, the findings of this study highlighted that an openness and ability to navigate and utilise various digital tools and particularly the etiquette surrounding online

conduct in an online environment had become an important leadership skill. Knowing the online rules of engagement when it comes to switching cameras on or off, how to participate in discussions and ask questions and how to encourage team interactions form part of this new skill set.

The advances in digital technology have enabled organisations to deploy virtual teams without the constraints of location and physicality which has seen the rise in studying their relevance in current literature (Choi & Cho, 2019). Working in virtual teams has the potential to increase work flexibility and offer improved work-life balance advantages to employees which may lead to improved job satisfaction (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Liao, 2017). However, as stated in more recent literature virtual leaders need to be conscious of the disadvantages of constant connectivity as the burdensome demand of technology which has been shown to add to performance issues and stress (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). Equally important, current literature has recognised the need for virtual leaders to embrace the responsibility of keeping abreast of the latest tools and technology which is constantly evolving to remain competitive in this context (Mehtab et al., 2017).

Thus, the findings of this study support literature in that it confirms the already known disadvantages and risks associated with virtual working environments, however as the remote work or hybrid working model is to become more prevalent for organisations who have both geographically dispersed teams and teams that work remotely and in the office on a regular basis post the pandemic, these findings suggest that organisations should carefully consider their approach to their remote working policies and their intended outcomes, fair treatment of all or attracting and retaining key talent? Furthermore, these findings compare to current literature in that leaders of virtual teams are to keep abreast of the latest tools and technology to enable their teams to function adequately but also be flexible themselves in adapting to change if they are to remain or become more competitive versus other organisations.

6.5 Conclusion

The discussion of the research findings was aimed at understanding what influence, if any, leading traditional teams operating in a sudden virtual environment had on a leader's perceived effectiveness and identity compared to what has already been studied in current literature as the known working environments were dramatically altered due to the onset of the pandemic. Furthermore, the research findings explored what leadership may look like going forward based on the participants experiences as the likelihood of the hybrid model that integrates both in-person and virtual ways of working staying is high (Wang et al., 2021).

To summarise the key discussion points per research question, a conceptual model of the influences and resulting experiences are presented in figure 2 below. The model illustrates the environmental aspects that leaders were subject to albeit outside of their direct scope of control which had knock-on ramifications as shown in the outermost circle. Within this context, the influences of the two leadership constructs studied, namely leadership effectiveness and identity are shown in the inner circle. Lastly, both the external and internal influences resulted in both expected experiences as well as surprising findings as leaders managed traditional teams remotely.

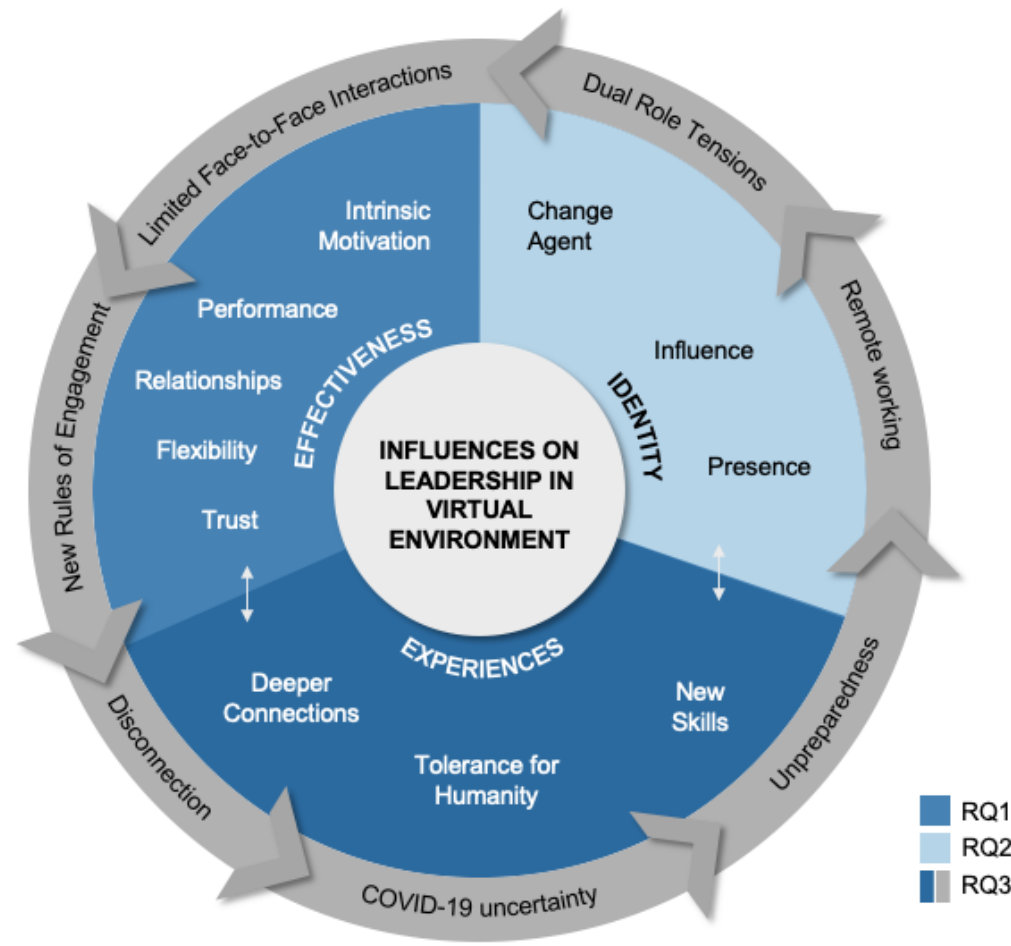


Figure 2: Conceptual Model of Leadership Effectiveness and Identity Influences within a Sudden Virtual Working Environment

CHAPTER 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This research study aimed to understand what influence, if any, the rapid onset of the pandemic had on leading traditional teams who had to operate in a sudden virtual environment had on a leader's perceived effectiveness and identity. In addition, this study aimed to explore what leaders who navigate the new hybrid working model would need going forward through understanding what influenced their recent experiences. Thus, this chapter presents a summarised view of the main findings obtained from this study. Further, it provides the managerial implications and recommendations based on the outcomes of the findings. Lastly, this chapter provides an overview of the limitations of this research and suggestions for future areas of interest which can be considered for further study.

7.2 Principal Conclusions

7.2.1 Influences on Leadership Effectiveness

Leadership effectiveness, one of the fundamental determinants of organisational success (Zeb et al., 2018), in this study confirmed that business survival during the pandemic relied on the ability of leaders and teams to adapt to change that included new ways of working with each other through new and unfamiliar digital technologies (Contreras et al., 2020; Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Furthermore, this required leaders to be flexible in their expectations as many employees had to juggle both home and work responsibilities simultaneously. Additionally, as leadership effectiveness is contingent upon gaining trust, especially in times of uncertainty and change (Norman et al., 2010), the findings of this study highlighted that performance required trust to be reciprocated; leaders had to gain trust but equally had trust their teams to conduct their work effectively from home. Closely interlinked with both leadership effectiveness and subsequently performance, was the role of motivation and influence (Contreras et al., 2020; Giessner et al., 2009). The findings of this study pointed to leaders having to pay greater attention to the emotional and mental states of their teams above any other

type of intrinsic motivational tactic to influence performance due to their inability 'sense' demotivation or disengagement by not being in regular physical contact with their teams.

Equally important, most participants in this study remarked that the virtuality of remote work and consequent lack of face-to-face engagements also led to teams becoming more disconnected accompanied by feelings of isolation and disengagement due to the lack of socialisation confirming literature that supports these known disadvantages of virtual teams (Contreras et al., 2020; Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Although the findings of this study indicated that the remote working practices during the pandemic led to disconnected teams, it surprisingly found that leaders were building deeper connections with their teams by getting to know them more personally during that period, presenting the paradox of connection. Another paradoxical finding was a leader's ability to influence; hampered virtually by not being privy to or overhearing conversations as they would occur naturally in the office providing a spontaneous opportunity to influence but enhanced online due to engaging with colleagues in the wider organisation not exposed to previously.

7.2.2 Influences on Leadership Identity

The findings of this study revealed that the sudden change in the working environment required a greater need to change some of their behaviours as opposed to their own perceptions. Identity provides guidance in terms of how leaders should behave to be perceived as a leader, especially in times of turmoil and change as stated in current literature (Giessner et al., 2009). Leaders in this study were required to lead by example by demonstrating their own capacity to adapt to new tools and means of engaging. Additionally, exhibiting greater soft skills, particularly with regards to paying attention to the emotional and well-being of their teams, became heightened during the pandemic caused by all the uncertainty related to it.

At the same time, presence, or lack thereof was the one outcome of the shift to virtual teams that hampered leaders' identities in context of their wider organisations as they were no longer seen by indirect team members and other colleagues. Their relevance and identities as leaders outside of their immediate teams became negatively influenced as a result.

7.2.3 Considerations for Hybrid Leadership

The findings of this study corroborate the emotional toll that the pandemic had on most that hinged on the uncertainty of potentially falling ill, losing loved ones, job insecurity whilst working from home that required sharing temporary, non-ideal workspaces with spouses or other family members added to general household and caretaking duties. This indeed led to unintended outcomes such as work-home interference and dual role tensions when attempting to work from home (Waizenegger et al., 2020; Kantamneni, 2020). As the pandemic exposed the world to similar restrictions, most people were facing the same personal challenges. Consequently, this has led to a greater tolerance for being human about these affairs in the workplace whereas previously most individuals typically could separate 'work self' from 'home self' forcing leaders to relax their expectations of delivering outputs under such circumstances. In like manner, if leaders' team members were struggling to perform, they had to consider the emotional and mental well-being as a potential root cause before implementing performance improvement plans. The ability to work with subordinates as wholistic beings thus requires greater empathy and mature leaders.

By the same token, the new remote working conditions during the pandemic resulted in a slowdown of collaboration due to the loss of the quick and informal conversations that would naturally occur in office settings. Thus, this brought about delays in communication and decision making since there became an over reliance on online meetings to engage with others and obtain feedback. Together with this, leaders' diaries became over-booked leaving little time to manage their own outputs. Although the known world of work was disrupted, the findings of this study and literature warn leaders against over exploiting the constant connectivity and burdensome demands of technology placed on teams known to add to performance issues and stress (Chamakiotis et al., 2021) highlighting the unknown tolerance towards the newly established 'always on' culture.

Lastly, and closely related is the ability of leaders to embrace the new rules of online engagement, being confident and able to utilise various online tools and digital platforms has become an important leadership skill. Similarly, leaders need to consider what their desired outcomes are before formalising their work from home

policies, namely fair treatment for all, provided work can be conducted remotely, or a more flexible alternative intended to attract and retain key talent?

7.3 Implications for Management and other Relevant Stakeholders

As the hybrid working model has been predicted to be the preferred working model (Wang et al., 2021) that combines the benefits of both in-person and virtual working environments, the findings of this study provide some insight and recommendations on how to navigate both environments for leaders and organisations alike. Figure 3 below provides an overview of the implications for both management and organisations based on the findings of the study:

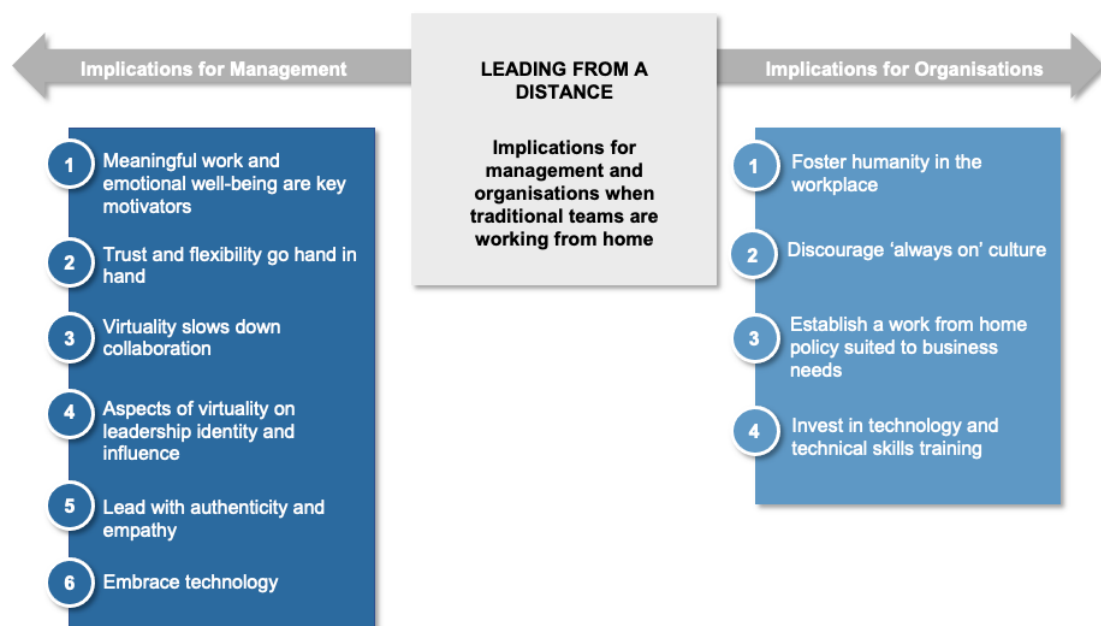


Figure 3: Implications for Management and Organisations

7.3.1 Implications for Management

The research findings of this study provide recommendations for leaders who are increasingly working in a hybrid model actively leading teams virtually as well as in-person. Although the findings of this study were derived from a snapshot in time, particularly based on experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, some findings remain relevant to the future of leadership, or hybrid leadership in the modern workplace.

7.3.1.1 Meaningful Work and Emotional Well-Being are Key Motivators

Motivation remains a powerful force that influences behaviour whereby leaders can use their energy in strategic ways to inspire and motivate teams (Zeb et al., 2018). Although obtaining buy-in into a vision and common goal remains a relevant intrinsic motivational factor, creating a space where work is meaningful whereby each individual understands their role and how they contribute to the common goal is still necessary. However, as there are many known disadvantages of working remotely caused by the lack of face-to-face interactions which can lead to disengagement and isolation due to the lack of socialisation (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020), leaders should invest in the emotional and mental well-being of their teams to keep them motivated, especially during times of uncertainty and change.

7.3.1.2 Trust and Flexibility Go Hand in Hand

Gaining trust from team members is required to become an effective leader, especially in times of uncertainty and change (Norman et al., 2010), however, remote working practices require leaders to be able to trust their teams to effectively conduct their work from home. It is known that remote working can offer increased work flexibility and work-life balance advantages which can lead to increased job satisfaction (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Liao, 2017), however, leaders need to be mindful that juggling home and work responsibilities simultaneously is a reality for many. Therefore, it is important for leaders to keep teams focused amidst many distractions and interruptions which is challenging. Equally, leaders need to be flexible in their expectations of how, when and where teams conduct their work and be more concerned with outputs rather than the processes.

7.3.1.3 Virtuality Slows Down Collaboration

The known disadvantages of virtual teams, particularly lags in member exchanges, delay in communication and disconnection (Benishek & Lazzara, 2019; Liao, 2017) still apply to hybrid teams, namely those that mainly work remotely and meet in-person on a regular basis. Thus, it is advisable that leaders nurture the benefits of being in proximity from time to time, especially ensuring that teams co-ordinate their in-office days at the same time to encourage spontaneous collaboration through

socialisation and other task-driven and informal interactions. Leaders must also discourage emulating remote working practices when teams are in the office, that is, encourage meetings to be in-person or even reconfigure office layouts to encourage interaction.

7.3.1.4 Aspects of Virtuality on Leadership Identity and Influence

The findings of this study suggest that presence is still relatively important for leadership identity. As identity provides a guide as to how leaders are to behave (Giessner et al., 2009), being seen to embrace change has been increasingly relevant to a leader's identity in the hybrid model as how a leader behaves dictates the behaviour of the rest of the organisation to an extent. However, leaders who are working in hybrid models and leading hybrid teams need to be cognisant that presence, or lack thereof, in and around the office can reduce their identity in context of the wider organisation who do not interact with them on a regular basis. Therefore, it is in a leader's best interest to be seen as making positive contributions to the business by others in their organisations by simply showing up and remaining within their periphery.

7.3.1.5 Lead with Authenticity and Empathy

As leaders and their teams are straddling both virtual and in-person environments, leaders are to embrace their own and their teams' authentic selves, meaning 'work self' and 'home self' are two identities that can no longer be separated as work-life boundaries have become more blurred which should be factored into their expectations of how, when and where teams conduct their work which requires flexibility and trust. Furthermore, the ramifications of the impact the pandemic had on people's lives and subsequently mental health are still at large, and thus leaders ought to prioritise the mental and emotional well-being of teams before they can do the work, which requires leaders to put an empathetic foot forward. In like manner, when it comes to reviewing performance of teams, particularly poor performance, leaders can consider supporting individuals' mental health and general well-being as opposed to performance improvement plans based on the identification of the root cause, thus leaders are to recognise and work with their teams as holistic beings.

7.3.1.6 Embrace Technology

Closely linked with leading by example, leaders of hybrid teams need to adapt and keep abreast of the latest online platforms and digital tools used to conduct remote work even if it is not their preference. Furthermore, leaders are to be the custodians of the new rules of engagement and set the example of what is appropriate and expected online conduct, the ability to navigate both various online tools and online etiquette has become an important leadership skill.

7.3.2 Implications for Organisations

7.3.2.1 Foster Humanity in the Workplace

As work-life integration has become heightened because of the pandemic, being more tolerant of the humanness of people has crept back into business as employees can no longer separate 'work selves' from 'home selves'. Thus, organisations should foster a culture that celebrates the realities of being human and that engaging with others does not always have to be centred around business.

7.3.2.2 Discourage the 'Always On' Culture

What currently remains unknown is what peoples' tolerance will be to the burdensome demand of technology and constant availability that make them easily accessible to others as the pandemic subsides. Consequently, organisations should discourage such behaviour and culture as even though it allows for fast response times, the negatives of excessive stress, burnout, productivity loss and poor work-life balance far outweighs any upside (Avolio et al., 2014).

7.3.2.3 Establish a Work from Home Policy that Best Suits Organisational Needs

Working from home is fast becoming the preferred method by many workers who can do so, (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Contreras, et al., 2020). Thus, as organisations adapt their practices to continue allowing employees to work remotely now that the pandemic has come to an end, they should put careful consideration into their

policies based on their organisational requirements; who qualifies for remote work and is fair treatment for all a requirement or is flexibility to attract and retain key talent by not stipulating stringent policies more necessary?

7.3.2.4 Invest in Technology and Technical Skills Training

As the future workforce is increasingly seeking remote work as their preferred working model (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Contreras, et al., 2020), organisations should invest in the latest technological tools and platforms that enables this way of working whilst training employees in using it effectively. Similarly, if organisations rely on effective leadership to execute strategies aimed at accomplishing an over-arching goal in the new hybrid working model, organisations should invest in training their leaders to navigate technological developments to remain effective in this hybrid space whereby contributing to the competitive edge of an organisation and acquiring key talent becomes a by-product.

7.4 Limitations of the Research

Even though quality controls were put in place to promote the reliability and credibility of the findings, this research study remained subject to the same limitations of most qualitative research in that selection and information bias was unavoidable as a purposive sampling technique was used as the perceptions and experiences of participants selected by the researcher were subjective (Tomaszewski et al., 2020; Sharma, 2017). Coupled with this, qualitative research is not statistically representative and does not investigate causality (Wang & Cheng, 2020), thus approaching the findings with caution is advised when making inferences to broader populations as participants in this study were able to conduct their work remotely and were all based in the same geographical location, namely the province of Gauteng, South Africa, and may not be transferable to other populations. Lastly, the findings of this study is based on the data collected from a snapshot in time and it is unknown to what extent the experiences and views provided by the participants will remain relevant to future hybrid working environments.

7.5 Suggestions for Future Research

As mentioned throughout this study, the likelihood of the hybrid working model becoming the preferred way to work is high as those who can work from home prefer to do so, thus suggesting that hybrid leadership is becoming more relevant (Wang et al., 2021; Chamakiotis, et al., 2021; Contreras et al., 2020). In addition the advances in technological tools and platforms in the workplace have outpaced the practice and science of leadership and warrants further investigation (Avolio et al., 2014). Thus, future studies can investigate:

- What enabled leaders to build deeper connections with their teams while working remotely during the pandemic, particularly exploring the influence of collective experiences or traumatic events
- What employees' and leaders' tolerance towards the 'always on' culture is and if it is a consideration when choosing an organisation to work for or if it is a leader's expectation of their teams who work from home
- If a relationship between a more humane workplace and employee engagement or organisational performance exists
- What the key considerations are when organisations adopt or create work from home policies
- If performance can be improved by providing employees with mental health and well-being support as opposed to performance improvement plans

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APPENDIX A: Interview Guide

Leading from a distance: Exploring leadership effectiveness and identity approaches when traditional teams are working from home

Duration: 45 – 60 minutes

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this interview which forms part of my MBA research journey through GIBS, I appreciate your input and time. To begin, I will ask you a few preliminary questions to establish your role followed by a series of questions relating to your role as a manager/leader of a team and your personal experiences in fulfilling the requirements leading them pre-, during and post- the pandemic. I encourage you to be as open and direct as possible and please ask for clarification at any point if anything is unclear?

Preliminary Questions

- What industry are you in?
- What is your current job title?
- What level of management are you?
- How long have you led teams throughout your career?
- What is the size of your current team(s)?
- On average, what is the current split of your team interactions between face-to-face and online/virtually?

Theme: Managing Traditional Teams Before the Pandemic

Question 1

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, what did your typical workday look like?

Probing questions:

- How did you typically engage with your team? How often?
- How did your team typically engage with each other? How often?
- Was there a sense of collaboration or cohesion? How did you foster that?
- Did you or your team ever work remotely? How often?

Theme: Leadership Effectiveness Before the Pandemic

Question 2

What made you a successful team leader in this context?

Probing questions:

- How did you measure performance of your team?
- How did you motivate them?

Theme: Managing Traditional Teams During the Pandemic

As you know, the onset of the pandemic was abrupt, and the subsequent lockdowns imposed changed many teams into virtual teams overnight whereby working remotely with limited to no face-to-face interactions became the norm.

Question 3

How did your work environment change due to the COVID-19 pandemic for you and your team?

Probing questions:

- What were the biggest challenges you faced?
- What were the biggest challenges your team(s) faced?

Question 4

During the COVID-19 pandemic, what did your typical workday look like?

Probing questions:

- How did you typically engage with your team? How often?
- How did your team typically engage with each other? How often?
- Was there a sense of collaboration or cohesion? Did this change? If so, why?

Theme: Leadership Effectiveness When Managing Traditional Teams During the Pandemic

Question 5

What made you a successful team leader in this new, unprecedented context?

Probing questions:

- Was there a change in your team's performance? If so, what, and why do you think so?
- How did you measure performance? Did this change? If so, why?

- How did you motivate them? Did this change? If so, why?
- What made the biggest impact?
- What would you say has contributed positively or negatively to your working with your team since the pandemic?

Theme: Leadership Identity

At a simplified level, leadership identity relates to how you see yourself as a leader, and how you act and behave accordingly that influences whether others see you as a leader and influenced by you as a result.

Question 6

Has your approach to leadership changed since the pandemic?

Probing questions:

- If so, what did you have to change? Why? How did you do it?
- Have the dynamics between you and your team changed in this new working environment? What and how?
- Has your ability to influence others been impacted in this new context? If so, how?
- Has your identity as a leader strengthened or weakened? Why?
- What would you say has contributed positively or negatively to your leadership identity since the pandemic?

Theme: The Changing Nature of Leadership

Question 7

The hybrid working model is predicted to become the 'new normal' if not already. What in your view do you believe are going to be the necessary skills and requirements leaders of teams who straddle both virtual and in-person settings will need going forward? Why?

Concluding Question

Is there anything you would like to share or find relevant to this topic that I have not asked you about?

APPENDIX B: List of Codes

List of Codes

RQ1 Before COVID Incentives and bonuses as extrinsic motivational factors

RQ1 Before COVID extrinsic motivational factors

RQ1 Before COVID financial incentives were used to motivate teams

RQ1 Before COVID salaries were used to motivate teams relative to value creation

RQ1 Before COVID Open and learning environments contributed to motivation

RQ1 before covid active listening to motivate teams

RQ1 before covid creating a learning environment to motivate

RQ1 Before COVID creating positive mindset used to motivate

RQ1 Before COVID openness and transparency contributed to motivation

RQ1 Before COVID Teamwork as intrinsic motivational factor

RQ1 Before COVID outputs and annual reviews as measures of performance

RQ1 Before covid annual performance reviews were used to measure performance

RQ1 Before COVID outputs according to business cycles was how performance was measured

RQ1 Before COVID performance of team could be determined by feedback from others

RQ1 Before Covid Servant Leadership contributed to effectiveness

RQ1 Before COVID being present with regular sense checks contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 Before COVID making yourself available to others contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 Before COVID seeking alternative views contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 Before covid understanding people well contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 Before COVID working shoulder to shoulder contributed to leadership

RQ1 Before COVID Shared vision and clear roles and responsibilities

RQ1 before covid benefit of body language and facial expressions

RQ1 Before COVID continuous communication contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 Before COVID having clear priorities and roles contributed to effectiveness

RQ1 Before COVID same rules and expectations for all contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 Before COVID sharing vision contributed to leadership

RQ1 Before COVID Shared vision and meaningful work as key intrinsic motivational factors

RQ1 Before COVID creating an environment for meaningful work was used to motivate teams

RQ1 Before COVID intrinsic motivation factors used to motivate teams

RQ1 before COVID sense of purpose drove outcomes

RQ1 Before COVID sharing vision and purpose contributed to intrinsic motivational factors

RQ1 Before COVID Sharing successes and recognition contributed to intrinsic motivation

RQ1 before covid praise and recognition as motivational factors

RQ1 Before COVID sharing success stories as intrinsic motivational factors

RQ1 Before COVID why it is important to be consistent in recognition

RQ1 Before COVID Trusting your team

RQ1 Before COVID being pro technology contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 Before COVID high work ethic was a requirement

RQ1 Before COVID not micromanaging contributed to leadership

RQ1 Before COVID Understanding your team well

RQ1 Before COVID being able to relate to the team on technical level contributed to leadership

RQ1 Before COVID knowing what motivates the team

RQ1 Before COVID proximity to colleagues enabled quick problem solving

RQ1 Before COVID removing barriers and providing support contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 COVID Impacted Performance

RQ1 outputs and timelines unclear in COVID context

RQ1 reasons that impacted performance

RQ1 timelines changed from planned cycles to daily, weekly outputs

RQ1 Extrinsic motivational factors

RQ1 Extrinsic incentives as motivational factors

RQ1 Extrinsic motivational factors hampered due to unknown outputs

RQ1 virtual social events as motivational factors

RQ1 Flexibility and agility to adapt to new ways of working

RQ1 Adapting business processes and tools to equip teams in new environment

RQ1 balance between outputs and flexibility contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 Extensive travel contributed to readiness to work from home

RQ1 flexibility to re-establish new ways of working contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 importance of communication and routine

RQ1 not micromanaging contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 Successfully achieving requirements working from home

RQ1 Leading by example and with confidence in times of crisis

RQ1 Ability to get buy-in into the vision

RQ1 Ensuring team safety due to working conditions was important

RQ1 Experience and knowledge contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 leading by example and achieving goals

RQ1 Projecting confidence in crisis contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 Reassurance and job security was important to teams

RQ1 seeking input and feedback from all stakeholders to address challenges contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 Loss of connection impacted motivation

RQ1 how motivation was impacted due to loss of connection

RQ1 lack of personal connection made motivation challenging

RQ1 Negative: Impact of virtuality on ways of working

RQ1 Default to online engagement even in the office

RQ1 Lack of human and emotional engagement due to virtuality

RQ1 Learning on the job impacted

RQ1 Life became a calendar event

RQ1 Virtuality slowed down communication and problem solving

RQ1 Negative: Juggling home and work responsibilities

RQ1 Juggling home and work responsibilities

RQ1 Performance measures had to change

RQ1 business measures changed to accommodate change in environment

RQ1 reasons performance measurements had to change

RQ1 Positive: Ability of team to adapt

RQ1 Bottom-up problem solving

RQ1 Easier access to people facilitated by online tools

RQ1 People stepping up to deliver value and contribute

RQ1 Quick integration and rapid adoption of this way of work

RQ1 Positive: Connecting with team on a deeper level

RQ1 Emotional support

RQ1 Getting to know the team better

RQ1 knowing peoples strengths and weaknesses

RQ1 influence has strengthened

RQ1 Taking care of mental health

RQ1 Purpose as intrinsic motivational factor

RQ1 Sense of purpose as intrinsic motivational factor

RQ1 sharing ideas as motivational factor

RQ1 Soft skills matter more than ever

RQ1 Addressing miscommunication issues that caused tension

RQ1 Building relationships on respect contributed to leadership effectiveness

RQ1 soft skills became more important for leadership effectiveness

RQ1 Support as motivational factor

RQ1 conversations and mental health as motivational factors

RQ1 Personal interactions as motivational factors

RQ1 providing company and professional support to motivate

RQ1 Team members as mentors as intrinsic motivational factor

RQ1 Why some performance measures remain unchanged

RQ1 performance measures remained unchanged

RQ1 reasons that did not impact performance

RQ2 Challenges impacting leadership identity

RQ2 challenges about working remotely

RQ2 Different personalities dealt with remote working differently

RQ2 market identity lost due to virtual working

RQ2 more direct to achieve business outcomes

RQ2 In-person influence remains key

RQ2 In-person influence stronger than virtual

RQ2 Influence enhanced by remote working due to wider network

RQ2 New ways of working influenced leadership identity/approach

RQ2 Challenges that strengthened leadership identity

RQ2 Experiences that influenced leadership approach

RQ2 Fundamental belief shift and more tolerant

RQ2 how leadership influence is impacted by remote working

RQ2 How new leadership style impacts new work environment

RQ2 Trust was enhanced due to new ways of working

RQ2 No change in leadership identity

RQ2 Fundamental leadership style did not change

RQ2 Why team identity remained unchanged

RQ2 Soft skills contributed to leadership identity

RQ2 Lead by example

RQ2 Positive was learning new communication skills

RQ2 requires more awareness about others

RQ2 softer skills were more required from leader

RQ3 Before COVID Being present meant keeping a finger on the pulse

RQ3 Before COVID being present facilitated connection and networking opportunities

RQ3 Before COVID benefit of body language and facial expressions

RQ3 Before COVID misinterpretations could be solved quicker by physically talking to the person

RQ3 Before COVID presence enabled leaders to know what was happening in the peripherals

RQ3 Before COVID presence enabled quicker ability to identify problems and solutions

RQ3 Before COVID work was primarily office based

RQ3 Before COVID Collaboration and engagement was informal, unplanned and enabled by proximity to others

RQ3 Before COVID collaboration was enabled by proximity to other people

RQ3 Before Covid Engagements were often informal and unplanned

RQ3 Before COVID if you wanted to speak to someone you would just go up to them

RQ3 Before COVID on the job training was facilitated by learning from others

RQ3 Before COVID sitting in open plan enabled people to talk to each other as needed

RQ3 Before COVID Teams relied on face-to-face interactions and meetings to engage

RQ3 Before COVID work was discussed over coffee or lunch breaks

RQ3 Before COVID Meetings were face-to-face but less formalised

RQ3 Before COVID daily SCRUM meetings were the norm

RQ3 Before COVID face-to-face interactions kept people accountable

RQ3 Before COVID meetings were primarily face-to-face

RQ3 Before COVID team meetings were less formalised

RQ3 Before COVID To be seen was to be seen working

RQ3 Before COVID downsides to open plan working

RQ3 Before COVID mentality of not seen to be working meant not working

RQ3 Before COVID people with performance issues had to work from the office

RQ3 Before COVID working long hours meant you are working hard

RQ3 Before COVID Working remotely was a rare occurrence

RQ3 Before COVID instant messaging was available but under utilised

RQ3 Before COVID late nights at the office were infrequent

RQ3 Before COVID not everyone had laptops

RQ3 before covid online meetings were conducted for people in Africa and Europe

RQ3 Before COVID remote working occurred seldomly and not encouraged

RQ3 Before COVID remote working was ad hoc and done to minimise disruptions

RQ3 Before COVID spent a lot of time travelling to be with team

RQ3 Dual Role tensions

RQ3 Challenge was managing dual roles of work and home life

RQ3 challenge was to keep people focused on their work amidst other home responsibilities

RQ3 Not all personalities adapted well to remote working

RQ3 Humanity has been brought back into the workplace

RQ3 Became OK to talk about life

RQ3 Challenge was coping with emotional states and anxiety

RQ3 how we related to people changed

RQ3 More tolerance to what people were dealing with

RQ3 Life became a calendar event

RQ3 Because of increase in email load collaboration moved to other channels of communication

RQ3 Biggest change saw days being filled with online meetings

RQ3 days spent on meetings with individual team members

RQ3 had to arrange equipment to enable remote working

RQ3 Impromptu meetings moved online

RQ3 Most employees had to work from home

RQ3 Online engagement became primary means of communication

RQ3 Online means of communicating became interruptive

RQ3 Work slowed down due to new way of communicating

RQ3 Navigating change in the unknown

RQ3 Challenge was crisis management without personal connection

RQ3 Challenge was magnitude of change

RQ3 Challenge was navigating uncertainty with confidence

RQ3 Concerns about job security

RQ3 concerted effort to maintain positive mindsets across all staff

RQ3 deliberate and frequent communication from management

RQ3 New skills required to work effectively

RQ3 Challenge was conflict caused by miscommunication

RQ3 Challenge was creating new routine

RQ3 Challenge was creating structure

RQ3 challenge was navigating new ways of working online

RQ3 Challenge was skills disparity when working remotely

RQ3 challenges conducting online meetings

RQ3 Not all social activities are suitable for online environment

RQ3 Not all work can be conducted remotely

RQ3 Logistical challenges for industries that cannot work remotely

RQ3 Nature of role required travel and in office presence

RQ3 why certain functions could not work from home

RQ3 Readiness enabled smooth transition

RQ3 Existing relationships helped overcome challenges

RQ3 Microsoft Teams was rolled out as a new tool just before the pandemic

RQ3 Online courses to enable effective remote working

RQ3 The business was already set up for remote connectivity

RQ3 why certain functions could work from home

RQ3 There are some productivity upsides to virtuality

RQ3 impact on collaboration

RQ3 In-person team engagement key for merging teams

RQ3 pleasantly surprised at how effective people were working from home

RQ3 Teams made up of different functions to drive business

RQ3 Teams no longer restricted to physical proximity

RQ3 understanding cultural nuances to team dynamics

RQ3 What leaders have lost due to loss of in-person leadership

RQ3 challenge was loss of face-to-face interaction

RQ3 Challenge was not being able to read body language

RQ3 Challenge was not being in periphery of team

RQ3 challenges less time to do own work

RQ3 what roles focused on might have changed based on ability to effectively work from home

RQ3.2 Ability to embrace online tools

RQ3.2 Ability to navigate online tools

RQ3.2 Adapt communication and lead by example

RQ3.2 Fair treatment in new policies

RQ3.2 Aligning mindsets to future work environments at leadership level

RQ3.2 Creating policies that are fair to all

RQ3.2 Explicit delegation of roles and responsibilities

RQ3.2 Explicit effort to network

RQ3.2 Explicit setting of expectations

RQ3.2 Flexibility to the new world of work

RQ3.2 Challenge is how to manage teams based on personas at home vs work

RQ3.2 Embrace teams reality and context of their hybrid working environments

RQ3.2 Flexibility towards how people work

RQ3.2 Lead with empathy and authenticity

RQ3.2 Challenge will be maintaining authenticity in dual worlds

RQ3.2 Emotional intelligence and communication

RQ3.2 Establishing trust that information will be shared

RQ3.2 Leading with empathy and authenticity

RQ3.3 More change is still to come

RQ3.3 Future of tolerance to always on culture

RQ3.3 how remote is remote work

RQ3.3 How to blend both worlds seamlessly

RQ3.3 How to get the best value out of both environments

RQ3.3 The cost of technology vs personal connections in future

RQ3.3 Standard leadership requirements remain unchanged

RQ3.3 Gearing up for growth

RQ3.3 How leaders need to avoid burnout themselves

RQ3.3 Succession plans

RQ3.3 The importance of protecting your people