

**Inclusive Leadership in Hybrid Teams: Cultivating Psychological Safety within
the Financial Sector**

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 epidemic caused a global disruption that created the norm of full-time virtual work. With the ending of the pandemic, organisations have embraced the new hybrid working paradigm, wherein people operate in co-locations. This novel phenomenon presents both advantages and challenges. Consequently, leaders retain the responsibility to manage effectively, remain agile and adapt as changes arise. The hybrid working model necessitates relational leaders capable of promoting well-being and inclusion while enhancing performance. Inclusive leadership is presently currently underexplored, and how it cultivates psychological safety in teams in this novel context remains unknown. This study aims to understand how leadership behaviours have shifted to foster inclusive environments in the current context. Furthermore, the role of inclusive leadership in promoting psychological safety within hybrid teams is explored.

This study employed a qualitative exploratory research methodology, which produced novel findings into the adaptation of leadership behaviours to foster inclusive hybrid teams. Furthermore, to comprehend the impact of inclusive leadership on psychological safety within hybrid teams. Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with hybrid working knowledge workers in the financial sector. The findings indicate that leaders who adopt an outcome-oriented strategy create inclusive environments. Additionally, the findings indicated the crucial role trust and open communication contribute towards fostering inclusive leadership that promotes psychological safety.

Keywords : *Inclusive Leadership; Psychological Safety; Hybrid Teams; Financial Sector; Communication; Trust*

PLAGIARISM 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 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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Chapter 1: Research Problem

1.1 Introduction

With the rapid change that occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, organisations experienced numerous uncertainties (De Vincenzi et al., 2022). This study explored inclusive leadership behaviours, and how they influence psychological safety in the current hybrid teams phenomenon. Chapter 1, highlights, the background of this study, the research problem and subsequently the purpose statement. Inclusive leadership is relational and is critical in the current post-pandemic work environment that requires psychological safety in teams (Beijer et al., 2024). Therefore, it is imperative to explore the critical challenges related to these two constructs and their significance to both literature and practice. Lastly, the research scope was outlined, which provides a clear guideline on how this research was conducted.

1.2 Background

The discovery of the COVID-19 pandemic towards the end of 2019 caused an unpredictable disruption worldwide when the declaration of a public health emergency was pronounced by the World Health Organisation (WHO). This resulted in mandatory restrictions and worldwide lockdowns that impacted the health of individuals and productivity within organisations (De Vincenzi et al., 2022). In South Africa, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in over 300,000 deaths, an average of 1.4 million job losses and a significant decline in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Financial Sector Contingency Forum, 2022).

This resulted in organisations urgently moving to virtual working models, where employees were working from home on a full-time basis, with a significant reliance on technology-mediated tools to conduct their day-to-day work deliverables (Bell et al., 2022; De Vincenzi et al., 2022). During this period, organisations had to prioritise technological readiness, and the well-being of employees, to enable them to be productive and maintain business continuity. (De Vincenzi et al., 2022). Remote working, e-working and virtual working are synonyms used to refer to teleworking arrangements, where work is conducted in various dispersed locations, with a significant reliance on technology (Bell et al., 2022; De Vincenzi et al., 2022). This study will use the term virtual working to refer to full-time online working.

Virtual working models are not uncommon; however, this mode of work was not prevalent before the pandemic. Organisations had to make major adjustments, and employees as well as management were required to embrace this sudden change (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). Scholars have stated numerous challenges such as a lack of boundaries between work and personal lives, and a lack of information from this working model, due to the intensity and pressure it had on employees. This compelled organisations to commit to prioritising the well-being of employees while balancing performance and productivity (De Vincenzi et al., 2022; Chamakiotis et al., 2021).

As the COVID-19 pandemic subsided over time organisations started adopting hybrid working models which are defined as employees working flexible hours in co-locations, some days at home, others physical in-office work (Sampat et al., 2022; Naqshbandi et al., 2023; Hincapie & Costa, 2024). Hybrid teams, hybrid working models and hybrid workplace are terms that are interchangeably used in literature (Peprah, 2023; Naqshbandi et al., 2023; Hincapie & Costa, 2024). Therefore, this study will use the terms hybrid teams and hybrid working models interchangeably to refer to hybrid working environments.

Scholars have mentioned the varying benefits of the hybrid working model, such as flexibility, work-life balance, and organisations have increased productivity and a significant reduction of fixed costs (Naqshbandi et al., 2023; Peprah, 2023; Hincapie & Costa, 2024). However, challenges such as delayed information sharing, delayed decision-making, isolation, and deteriorating team cultures have been identified by scholars (Naqshbandi et al., 2023; Peprah, 2023; Hincapie & Costa, 2024). It is further mentioned that managers should be able to balance hybrid positioning and hybrid competence of employees. Hybrid positioning means the ability to manage access to resources such as technology and social connections at different times, i.e. on virtual days and physical in-office days and hybrid competencies which refer to the ability to work optimally by coordinating work and meeting job demands (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

Leaders are tasked with building thriving hybrid working environments, as balancing the environment brings unique challenges to employees and organisations compared to virtual working environments during the pandemic (Mortensen & Haas, 2021; Sampat et al., 2022; Hincapie & Costa, 2024). Emerging leadership challenges that emanated from hybrid working models have required leaders to shift from traditional

leadership approaches to consider relational approaches to ensure that active employee engagement, openness, exchange of ideas and feedback (Bell et al., 2022; Simmon & Yawson, 2022; Detjen & Webber, 2023). Therefore, inclusive leadership is identified as the relational leadership style that is prevalent in creating a sense of belonging and uniqueness to address the challenges in hybrid teams (Bell et al., 2022; Simmons & Yawson, 2022).

1.3 Research Problem

1.3.1 Practical Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the global society of businesses, governments and individuals. Post the pandemic, organisations had to find ways to rebuild in this new phenomenon that changed business and society permanently. In the aftermath of the pandemic, organisations have been compelled to carefully plan and implement working arrangements, policies, and processes to accommodate the rise of hybrid working models (Teng-Calleja et al., 2023). The consideration of a work-life balance and well-being became important for employees after suffering various forms of loss, such as the unemployment rate which was 32,50% in quarter 4 of 2020 (Statistic South Africa, 2020).

Edmondson and Bransby (2023), stated that organisations have encountered uncertainty regarding ways of working, structures, and available opportunities and the role of leadership continues to be significant in addressing modern work challenges. Post the pandemic, there has been a growing interest from employees and organisations to adopt alternative working models as opposed to traditional full-time in-office working models (Hincapie & Costa, 2024). This led to the evolution of hybrid working models for global organisations where employee well-being and performance are prioritised (Sampat et al., 2022; Teng-Calleja et al., 2023).

This study focussed on hybrid working models as it has become a more common and balanced working model. However, it comes with a unique set of benefits and challenges. As a result, the role of leadership continues to be a phenomenon worth exploring in hybrid working models (Alexander et al., 2020), where there has been a need for leaders to create conducive working environments that enable people to excel and contribute to enhance team performance (Robert & Perry, 2021).

Organisations that operate in hybrid teams benefit from flexibility, operating cost reduction, increased employee satisfaction and engagement (Mortensen and Haas, 2021). However, in contrast, Hincapie and Costa (2024) stated that these organisations also face challenges such as reduced collaboration, information sharing, trust issues, unclear communication and technological issues. Subsequently, the dynamics of hybrid teams required adherence and adjustment from leadership, technology and overall organisational culture (Teng-Calleja et al. 2023).

Effective leadership is fundamental to all businesses. In terms of leadership in leading hybrid teams, it has been established that a relational leadership style is a requirement in hybrid teams (Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023). A hybrid working model requires a relational leadership style rather than the conventional approach suited for full-time office environments (Simmons & Yawson, 2022). This study explored inclusive leadership as appropriate for addressing challenges within hybrid teams as it fosters inclusion, which creates a sense of belonging and diversity in the workplace. This is, however, not achievable without intentional leaders who are equipped with the necessary competencies and behaviours to address dynamic challenges that may impact performance (Xiaotao et al., 2017; Simmons & Yawson, 2022).

Inclusive leadership behaviours are important in facilitating inclusive organisations, where inclusion in teams is prioritised. This, however, presents a gap, where leaders in practice have limited insight regarding how inclusive leadership behaviours are required to evolve and adapt in dynamic changing environments (Roberson & Perry, 2022; Simmons & Yawson, 2022; Beijer et al., 2024). With the evolution of hybrid work, there is currently no definitive direction, and it remains unknown how leaders should adapt in the post-pandemic perspective to maintain inclusion in organisations (Beijer et al., 2024).

Previous literature has proven in practice that inclusive leadership and psychological safety are interrelated, as inclusive behaviours foster psychological safety as an outcome in teams (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Ye et al., 2018; Roberson & Perry, 2022; Korkmaz et al., 2022). Therefore, this means that when followers experience inclusion they feel part of a team and appreciated for their differences. They can be free to express themselves and take interpersonal risks while maintaining high-quality relationships with others. However, a critical challenge identified in hybrid teams is how the lack of informal communication, collaboration and socialisation, negatively

impacts psychological safety and overall performance, where trust and a sense of inclusion are suppressed (Peprah, 2023; Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023).

Previous studies have proven that psychological safety is influenced by leadership, as leaders have the responsibility of creating an inclusive environment where accountability, transparency, trust, collaboration and support are encouraged (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Plester & Lloyd, 2023). The limited studies of inclusive leadership and psychological safety in hybrid teams, present a gap in understanding how inclusive leadership behaviours adapt to influence psychological safety in hybrid teams. This research problem presents challenges for organisations on how to navigate and adapt inclusive leadership behaviours to influence psychological safety in hybrid teams, as this can have a negative impact on organisations and ultimately, performance.

1.3.2 Theoretical Problem

Inclusive leadership and psychological safety are constructs that have been studied over decades, and previous studies have demonstrated both positive and negative outcomes between the two constructs. The positive outcomes include employee engagement, performance, learning and innovation (Frazier et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). In contrast, studies have proven that a negative relationship between the two constructs has negatively impacted organisations, such as a decline in performance, toxic environments and high employee turnover (Newman et al., 2017). These studies were historically conducted in traditional full-time in-office settings. However, this research argues that the unpredictable occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a contextual shift in leadership, psychology and organisational culture.

There is limited literature on the facilitators and challenges related to hybrid teams. Sampat (2023) stated that for hybrid teams to achieve sustainability, organisations are tasked with understanding the expectations of individuals and creating a sense of belonging in teams. Therefore, this study states that to achieve and maintain long-term sustainability, it is imperative for inclusive leaders to adapt and adjust their behaviours. Recent studies have found inclusive leadership as the suitable leadership style for hybrid teams, and to date, there is limited academic literature on this concept as it is still an emerging phenomenon (Beijer et al., 2024).

The second construct of this study is psychological safety which has been studied for several decades. Inclusive leadership plays an important role in psychological safety in traditional full-time office settings. (Roberson & Perry, 2021, Beijer et al., 2024). In contrast, Edmondson and Bransby (2023) discovered a noticeable gap in the existing literature regarding the methods that leaders use to build psychological safety in modern working teams, particularly in hybrid work models. This highlights the value and significance of psychological safety in the current “new normal” working models that encourage leaders to practice inclusive behaviours due to negative aspects such as isolation, burnout and uncertainty caused by the pandemic when employees are working in isolation (Beijer et al., 2024).

Scholars have reported that it is imperative to understand how leaders adapt to the disruptive change in emerging contexts, where traditional in-office working arrangements are no longer prominent, as employee experiences and preferences remain underexplored (Simmon & Yawson, 2022; Sampat et al., 2022; Beijer et al., 2024). Lastly, there is a distinct gap in the literature regarding the influence of inclusive leadership on the psychological safety of employees who work in hybrid settings. Therefore, there is a necessity to discover how inclusive leaders should adjust their behaviours to cultivate a psychologically safe environment for individuals in hybrid teams.

1.4 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to understand how inclusive leadership influences psychological safety in hybrid teams within the financial sector in South Africa.

1.5 Theoretical Purpose

Since the occurrence of COVID-19, leaders who are at the core of organisations found themselves in an unpredictable and competitive global economy, where the emergence of virtual and hybrid working models has become imperative for business continuity. Leaders have found themselves at the centre of adapting to managing employees in hybrid teams, the challenges and benefits it brings and the overall impact it has on employee psychological safety (Edmondson & Mortensen, 2021; Mortensen & Haas, 2021; Feitosa & Salas, 2021; Hincapie & Costa, 2024). The findings from this study will contribute to the body of knowledge on leadership and psychological theories for teams in a hybrid work environment.

1.6 Business Purpose

It is important to note that, while organisations require their leadership to effectively navigate the dynamics of hybrid teams. Organisations also require leaders to consider the impact hybrid working has on employee psychological safety (Edmondson & Mortensen, 2021). Psychological safety is defined as the confidence in having the ability to express oneself and engage in interpersonal risktaking without adverse consequences. (Khan, 1990; Edmondson, 1999). Leaders are challenged to foster environments where employees can share experiences that impact their overall well-being and work commitments (Edmondson & Mortensen, 2021). How these leaders adapt to dynamic changes is vital to maintaining continuity and organisational performance (Simmons & Yawson, 2022).

It is crucial for organisations to understand how inclusive leadership adapts to influence psychological safety in hybrid teams. Organisations can upskill and equip their leaders to adapt to the contextual change of hybrid working, as this ensures that leaders remain agile, and can manage the overall well-being of followers and performance. Additionally, organisations have the opportunity to enhance policies and training programmes to ensure that leaders adapt to the flexibility of the disruptive business landscape. Lastly, exploring this phenomenon from both leaders' and their direct followers' perspectives aims to obtain valuable insights into the role of inclusive leadership in hybrid settings.

1.7 Significance of Research for Business and Theory

As the dynamics of employee wellbeing and performance have become paramount. Leaders have been challenged to create a culture of inclusion within organisations, where employees' sense of belonging and uniqueness are embraced. Previous studies have asserted that when individuals develop a sense of belonging and feel appreciated for their uniqueness, it leads to psychological safety (Randel et al., 2018; Beijer et al., 2024). Therefore, as hybrid settings have become the norm, the exploration of inclusive leadership behaviours will practically demonstrate how leaders need to adjust their leadership style. Additionally, it will provide leaders with an opportunity to evaluate and measure their actions in the teams they lead and a possibility to enhance these actions (Canlas & Williams, 2022).

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature on inclusive leadership behaviours, and how leaders can adapt to disruptive changes and create an inclusive environment for individuals as hybrid teams evolve (Beijer et al., 2024). Previous studies stated that inclusion is defined as individuals who feel part of the group while being supported to maintain their uniqueness (Shore et al., 2011). Additionally, scholars have indicated a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological safety as it influences a sense of belonging and value for uniqueness, where individuals can be themselves without the fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

This study aims to provide an outcome that will contribute to and build on existing underexplored inclusive leadership, and psychological safety theories in a modern hybrid context (Edmondson, 1999; Randel et al., 2018; Beijer et al., 2024). Additionally, the findings from this study will contribute towards emerging hybrid and virtual theories. Lastly, with the increased attention to inclusion and employee outcomes, there is still a lack of understanding of how inclusive leadership fosters psychological safety to practically and theoretically implement complexities in modern work environments. The findings from this research will provide useful insights that can be applied in businesses and contribute to existing literature.

1.8 Research Scope

The objective of this study is to understand how inclusive leadership behaviours can adapt to influence psychological safety for individuals in hybrid teams. Previous studies have demonstrated inclusive leadership as a key driver for inclusion in work environments (Shore et al., 2011; Randel et al., 2018). Additionally, some studies have stated that inclusive leadership behaviours positively cultivate psychological safety in traditional in-office models (Nembhard & Edmonson, 2006; Xiao et al., 2017).

Inclusion has also been related to the concept of diversity and a clear distinction between the two concepts, is that with diversity there is a focus on demographic representation in the workplace, whereas inclusion addresses involvement in work-related activities (Randel et al., 2018; Wolfgruber et al., 2022). Although inclusive leadership is identified as a key driver of both concepts, this research focuses solely on the concept of inclusion as it relates to work-related activities. This study will be focused on an individual level only where the perspectives and experiences of leaders and their direct followers will be explored. Therefore, inclusive leadership

behaviours will not be assessed on an organisational and group level. The scope of this study is limited to the financial sector within South Africa. However, the outcome of the study may be applied to any sector in a broader context.

This research seeks to:

- i. Explore how leadership behaviours have adapted to foster an inclusive environment in the financial sector in hybrid teams.
- ii. Explore how inclusive leadership fosters psychological safety in hybrid teams.

1.9 Summary

Chapter 1 discussed the transition towards technology-driven dynamic work environments and highlighted a growing necessity to change the mindset of organisational leaders and their approach to interacting with employees at both the organisational and team levels. The research problem for this study, as identified in academic literature, following the pandemic requires further exploration. This exploration will enhance existing inclusive leadership and psychological safety theories and the emerging hybrid work theory which is classified under virtual work. This has led to various challenges, and theories such as psychological safety and inclusive leadership have emerged as important variables in organisational behaviour. This research aims to provide valuable insights for scholars and practitioners by identifying current difficulties and exploring how leaders can adjust their behaviours that foster a psychologically safety environment for team members in a hybrid context which ultimately leads to enhanced performance.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The objective of this study is to understand how inclusive leadership behaviours adapt to influence psychological safety in hybrid teams. The hybrid working environment is currently an under-explored concept as it only became a norm post the COVID-19 pandemic. This context has unique challenges that are distinct from traditional in-office settings and virtual work settings. The literature review will compare and contrast relevant literature related to hybrid work to provide clarity on the context and, leadership as a concept, and how it has evolved over the years. Furthermore, the literature on inclusive leadership style will be discussed in detail. The definition of inclusive leadership by different scholars, leader behaviour and how it is relevant in hybrid work. The concept of psychological safety will also be defined, and literature on how it has evolved and where it stands in hybrid working models, from a post-pandemic perspective. Lastly literature from different scholars on the relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological safety will be reviewed, particularly in a post-pandemic, hybrid setting.

2.2 Hybrid Working in the Financial Sector

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the South African financial sector as an essential service, developed crisis management practices to manage operations and business continuity (Centre of Excellence in Financial Services, 2022). At the peak of the pandemic, South Africa was downgraded by Moody's, Fitch and Standard & Poor which negatively impacted the financial sector during the global crisis (National Treasury, 2020), as this sector contributed 20% to the economy in 2020 (COEFS, 2022). The financial sector in S.A. contributes towards the effective operations of the economy, and the workforce within this sector plays a crucial role with both internal stakeholders and external stakeholders such as customers and regulators (COES, 2022).

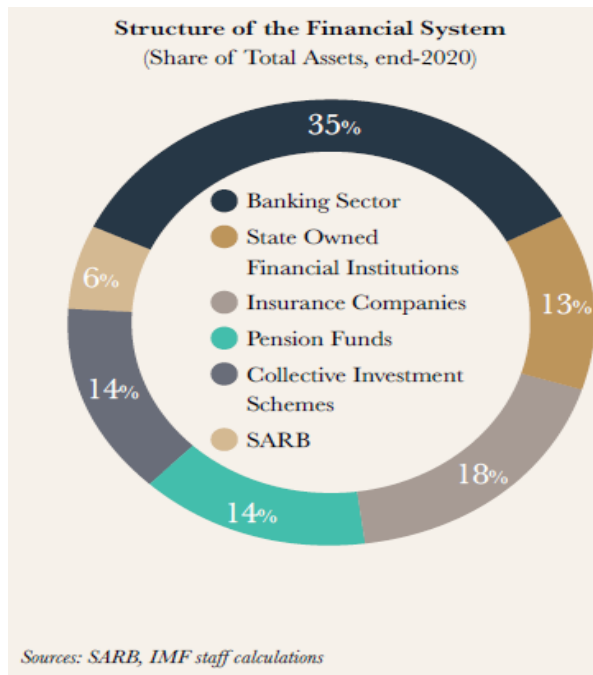


Figure 1: Structure of the Financial System (source COEFS, 2022)

The above Figure 1 is an illustration of the S.A. financial sector ecosystem, and this study will focus its exploration on the banking and insurance within the financial sector which comprises 53% of the overall financial sector (COEFS, 2022). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, organisations did not widely adopt a hybrid working model. However, as a result of the pandemic, organisations were compelled to transition to virtual work, which has subsequently led to the global implementation of the hybrid working model.

Hybrid working has gained popularity among employees due to the flexibility and independence it offers in the workplace (Peprah, 2023). However, conflicting research suggests that hybrid working has had adverse effects on employee well-being, leading to social isolation, decreased collaboration and a lack of leadership support within teams (Naqshbandi et al., 2023; Teng-Calleja et al., 2023). Therefore, the literature presents contrasting perspectives on how organisations can address the benefits and challenges of hybrid work. The study conducted by COEFS (2022) revealed that employees required a more people-centred approach, with social interaction, a sense of belonging, collaboration and leadership in the transition to hybrid work. This study affirms that from a South African context, it is worth exploring hybrid work as it is crucial for the workforce and organisations.

2.3 Leadership

Leadership theory has been studied by scholars and continues to be a complex phenomenon with extensive research being conducted to test the theory (Northouse, 2010; Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Previous studies have formulated theories on leadership, including its evolution and the significant role it plays in organisations. The definition of leadership is an act of influence within an organisation, it has also been defined as an act where leaders assume a role of guidance to their followers for specific targets in line with the values and aspirations of both leaders and followers (Johns & Moser, 1989). Northouse (2007) conceptualised leadership as a process where a group of team members are guided and influenced towards a shared objective by their leader. A common theme in the various definitions of leadership is the role of 'influence' that leaders contribute towards achieving goals in organisations. As the global economy has changed and evolved, the relevance of leadership continues to become an emerging concept.

2.3.1 New Leadership Era (1990's and 2000's)

The emergence of this era was due to the realisation that leadership not only requires one avenue such as situational or behavioural. However, there has been an imperative shift towards a more dynamic way of leadership (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). As the global economy continues to rapidly change, and technology continues to improve, the style of leadership in the organisation has become imperative as it is important to be agile and adapt to the new world of work. In the current leadership era, leadership is viewed from a holistic perspective, with the complexity that involves the leaders, followers, the context and the environment entirely (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Therefore, any change in these four factors, creates a gap in practice and literature, as leadership is a dynamic, evolving construct.

Leadership styles such as servant leadership, transformational leadership, and inclusive leadership, where collaboration and shared value have formed part of the leadership dynamics in this new leadership era. Inclusive leadership is recognised as a people-oriented leadership style (Benmira & Agboora, 2021), According to research on the transition in context from virtual work to hybrid work, the leadership theory presented businesses and scholars with unique challenges and unknowns, (De Vincenzi et al., 2022; Bell et al., 2022).

2.4 Conceptualization of Inclusion

In previous studies, inclusion was defined as a circumstance in which individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves without being afraid of criticism (Roberson & Perry, 2022), and where they perceive themselves as making a significant contribution to the decision-making process. Inclusion has also been defined as the extent to which followers feel they are valued in the work group and their differences are encouraged (Shore et al., 2011). From the diverse definitions of inclusion, previous studies have discovered that for team inclusion and organisational inclusion to exist, it is a process that starts at the individual level (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Scholars and practitioners have prioritised inclusion as the key to maintaining competitive advantage in the business world and the well-being of employees (Korkmaz et al., 2022), which has gained reasonable traction over the years. It is also argued that leaders must recognise the significant role they play in creating inclusive settings, where through the actions of leaders, there is a sense of concern and appreciation of how team members contribute (Randel et al., 2018). As well as being the champion of fostering “in-groups” for them (Randel et al., 2018). This specifically refers to both task and social inclusion, where team members feel involved and consulted in task-related matters and have interpersonal relationships with team members (Nguyen et al., 2023).

2.5 Definition, Theory Evolution and Related Outcomes

In a study conducted by Roberson and Perry (2022), the authors stated that inclusive leadership is essential in organisations because of the significant influence it has on the organisational culture which ultimately has an impact on performance and achieving goals. While the significance of effective leadership is acknowledged, leaders must identify leadership styles that foster positive high-quality leader-follower relationships and performance within the work environment. Inclusive leadership has become an emerging leadership style. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) defined inclusive leadership as the demonstration of leaders to recognise and welcome the contribution of others. Moreover, inclusive leadership has been positively linked to the facilitation of inclusion in the workplace.

Shore and Chung (2021) stated that inclusive leaders ensure that they create an environment where leader-follower relationships are prioritised, where team members

can share their views, experience psychological safety and ultimately contribute towards creativity and innovation within their teams. This is further elaborated by Carmeli et al. (2010), the authors indicate that inclusive leadership refers to leaders that are acceptable, approachable and free to engage with followers.

Wolfgruber et al. (2022) stated that to achieve successful inclusion, an inclusive leadership style should be implemented at all levels of an organisation. Additionally, it has been recognised that communication plays a crucial part in establishing an environment that embraces inclusion and creates belonging. Communication facilitates effective dialogue and reciprocal exchange of thoughts and opinions among teams (Wolfgruber et al., 2023). Additionally, the study further highlighted that formal and informal interpersonal communication has the potential to create exclusion in the work environment. Therefore, leaders and followers must be cautious about how they communicate with one another (Wolfgruber et al., 2022). The study further revealed that followers feel included in formal interpersonal communication, instead of informal interactions, this contradicts the study conducted by Chamakiotis et al. (2021), the authors emphasized informal interactions in hybrid work settings. Noting the imperative role communication plays in inclusive leadership, this research identifies this antecedent as a gap in the literature.

Other leadership styles differ from inclusive leadership as empowerment leadership. Empowering leadership fosters motivation among team members by promoting power-sharing (Randel et al., 2018). Transformational leadership is driven by growth and change towards achieving strategic goals (Randel et al., 2018). On the other hand, authentic leadership places emphasises the authenticity of the leader rather than the team members themselves, while still prioritising leader-follower interactions (Randel et al., 2018).

All these leadership approaches fail to address the crucial element of fostering a sense of belonging among team members, which is the essence of inclusive leadership (Randel et al., 2018; Beijer et al., 2024). Inclusive leadership is recognised as an important leadership style, as it encourages knowledge transfer and is adaptable and agile to a rapidly changing work environment (Nguyen et al., 2023; Beijer et al., 2024). This is currently limited information on this concept the literature remains underexplored. Leadership behaviours play a significant role in inclusive leadership as it is through this leadership style that team members feel they belong and their uniqueness is

valued which contributes significantly to creating inclusion within teams (Randel et al., 2018).

A theoretical framework by Shore et al. (2011) reflected on belonging and uniqueness, the scholars cautioned against having an imbalance between the two concepts. The reason is that it could potentially enforce exclusion, assimilation or differentiation, which has detrimental outcomes on team dynamics. The importance and significance of belonging and uniqueness bring about the practicality of team participation and this is an extension of Shore's inclusion framework (Randel et al., 2018). Inclusive leadership goes beyond just the ability of team members to have a voice or speak up in the workplace, but rather the crucial behaviours and competencies of leaders creating inclusive environments.

2.5.1 Belonging and Uniqueness

2.5.1.1 Belonging

The concept of belonging has been studied extensively, and it is a fundamental human need and an integral source of motivation (Canlas & Williams, 2022). Belonging is defined as the need for individuals to feel accepted, where there is room to create and maintain relationships within work groups (Shore et al., 2011; Randel et al., 2018). Leaders are important in facilitating a sense of belonging for team members for they to identify themselves within work groups and to contribute towards their sense of social identity (Fraizer et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017). There is no assertion of this impact by merely implementing inclusive leadership habits, and the uncertainty may lead to leaders seeing belonging as a final destination, instead of perceiving it as a continuous process.

Where the needs of individuals in teams are to be met to create belonging (Canlas & Williams, 2022). Scholars argue that the perception of exclusion and rejection is not only connected to how the next person perceives the relationship. However, how they perceive themselves within specific evolving contexts and whether they can fit within the environment (Canlas & Williams, 2022). This is corroborated by Beijer et al. (2024), the author stated in their study that inclusive leaders have to consistently adjust their behaviours depending on the context, and the extent to which followers feel included.

2.5.1.2 Uniqueness

Uniqueness forms a critical part of the inclusion framework, where the value of individual differences is recognised and encouraged for their diversity, knowledge, skills differences and how they contribute to their teams (Randel et al., 2018). Leaders are often challenged with the ability to understand the expectations of team members and how they require their uniqueness to be recognised. This places leaders in a position where they are not only required to facilitate belonging for team members. However, they are required to foster an environment where uniqueness is valued through their leadership behaviours (Shore et al., 2011; Randel et al., 2018; Korkmaz et al., 2022).

These leadership behaviours which have been identified by researchers, are important in leaders fostering inclusivity (Randel et al., 2018; Korkmaz et al., 2022; Beijer et al., 2024). In the context, post the COVID-19 pandemic, where the way of working has evolved, there is insufficient research to confirm the effectiveness of inclusive leadership behaviours due to how recent this relational leadership style is. Previous research proved a positive relationship between inclusion and inclusive leadership behaviours.

2.5.2 Inclusive Leader Behaviours

In a recent study conducted by, (Roberson & Perry, 2022), the authors identified that inclusive leadership can be explored in two distinct ways, from a diversity perspective and a leadership perspective. The study further explored the leadership perspective and reported that inclusive leaders demonstrate behaviours that deliberately encourage participation, and feedback dialogue (Roberson & Perry, 2022). This was corroborated by Carmeli et al. (2010) where the role of inclusive leadership was explored, and the findings of the study discovered that when leaders provide followers with an opportunity to be in environments that promote openness and robust engagement, it enables them to collaborate and share creative ideas.

Additionally, other studies have found that inclusive leadership behaviours foster outcomes such as performance and learning opportunities, (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Ye et al., 2019). A conflicting viewpoint from a study by Xiaotao et al. (2017) indicated that when levels of inclusive leadership rise from moderate to high, their effectiveness diminishes, resulting in a fall in outcomes such as performance. Therefore, these contrasting views from the literature present a gap on the level of impact inclusive leadership has on performance.

Inclusive leaders who possess competencies that enable them to build and maintain relationships through clear communication, regardless of differences and similarities with their followers have a positive impact on talent management, innovation and performance (Simmons & Yawson, 2022). This further translates to increased organisational performance. Four particular behaviours associated with an inclusive leader are: (1) treating team members with equity and respect while maintaining clear boundaries, (2) actively maintaining and building relationships; (3) encouraging and empowering team members to contribute their ideas to solve challenges, (4) displaying appreciation for team members' efforts (Randel et al., 2018; Wolfgruber et al., 2022; Korkmaz et al., 2022; Shafaei & Nejati, 2023; Beijer et al., 2024). The four inclusive behaviours will be briefly detailed below, to provide an overview of the importance of exhibiting these behaviours.

2.5.2.1 Ensuring Equity

Inclusive leaders must ensure create a sense of equity in their teams, where there is mutual trust and respect between the leader and their followers. Previous studies discovered that when individuals within teams are treated fairly by their leader, they feel they belong and feel part of the team. However, the context was not an explicit consideration in the studies conducted by (Shore, 2011; Randel et al., 2018; Korkmaz et al., 2022). This argument is corroborated by Wiatr and Skowon-Mielnik (2022), in their study, the authors suggest that although leaders facilitate the shared goals within teams, it is rather challenging to maintain equity when team members are partly in the office and off-site at different times. Therefore, these challenges create a need for leaders to develop strategies to build and maintain trust in their teams.

2.5.2.2 Building and Maintaining Relationships

Inclusive leaders prioritise high-quality relationships with team members as a way of fostering of belonging but also creating accessibility for team members (Randel et al., 2018). This makes individuals feel part of the work group, where they can perform and collaborate with leaders and team members where there is a physical distance (Ye et al., 2019). However, it is easier for leaders who have fewer differences with followers to maintain relationships. This view is supported by previous studies where it was found that high levels of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) in diverse work groups, resulted in a significant employee turnover, mostly with followers that leaders have similarities with (Shore et al., 2011).

Additionally, a critical challenge identified by Hincapie and Costa (2024), suggests that sub-groups in hybrid environments can negatively impact belonging and team performance and this can be mitigated by creating an environment where there is a shared sense of common goals, clear expectations and communication to improve performance and maintain social connections. The contrasting views from the literature suggest that it is unclear how relationships can be fairly fostered in hybrid teams.

2.5.2.3 Empowering Team Members

Studies state that direct supervisors can have a significant influence sense of uniqueness in the work environment of followers, particularly where there are varying values and perspectives (Shore et al., 2011). Additionally, inclusive leaders have an opportunity to provide individuals with an opportunity to contribute and participate in team collaborations to encourage employees to provide their unique views and skills that are valuable to achieving decision-making and ideation in teams (Randel et al., 2018). However, considering a hybrid environment, leaders are challenged with the ability to facilitate empowerment through collaboration due to physical distance. This view is corroborated by Naqshbandi et al. (2023), the authors mentioned that a challenging aspect of hybrid work is the reduction in support and feedback from fellow team members and their leaders, which negatively impacts employee engagement. Ultimately resulting in slow decision-making, performance, innovation capacity and social identity.

2.5.2.4 Recognition and Contributions

Inclusive leaders who show appreciation to their followers as a way of affirming and motivating them for their efforts recognise the need to create a sense of commitment to their work and to applaud performance. When leaders recognise contributions made by individuals, the impact is two-fold, one is on the individual themselves and the other is on the team, as the achievement encourages all team members to improve performance (Korkmaz et al., 2022). However, leaders and fellow team members indicated that hybrid work posed a challenge in terms of recognising the efforts of followers due to geographical limitations (Beijer et al., 2024).

2.6 Psychological safety

2.6.1 Introduction

Psychological safety is a concept that has been explored by several scholars; However, the research has always focused on full-time in-office settings. Psychological

safety has been positively related to outcomes such as creativity and performance (Carmeli et al., 2010). However, as hybrid teams have become common, there is insufficient research on how psychological safety is fostered in hybrid teams. This presents a gap in the literature due to the new norm of hybrid teams.

2.6.2 Definition and Theory Evolution

The post-COVID-19 pandemic dynamic and rapid changes in the business world, have necessitated that organisations explore strategies that promote high performance, well-being of employees, work-life balance and flexibility. Edmondson and Bransby (2023) suggest that in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a greater emphasis on collaborative work compared to the past decade as organisations are now responsible for establishing conducive conditions that facilitate a collaborative culture. This is why it becomes important to create a psychologically safe work culture. Psychological safety is a key driver of conducive collaborative environments. The concept of psychological safety was first introduced in 1965 by Schein and Bennis. The concept was defined as the ability for individuals to express themselves and take interpersonal risks without fear of possible repercussions, which is a cognitive state that has an impact on learning and change (Edmondson, 1999; Fraizer et al., 2017).

Psychological safety is described as a common understanding across teams where individuals feel secure within work groups (Khan, 1990; Edmondson, 1999; Newman et al., 2017). Psychological safety is when team members have a shared belief in taking interpersonal risks, where common perceptions, trust and respect exist and there is the freedom to share views, openness to honest feedback and owning up to errors without the fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson, 2004; Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). The above definitions summarize the key points of psychological safety which is a sense of feeling safe and taking interpersonal risks without fear irrespective of whether it is on an individual or team level. Psychological safety is acknowledged as an active and intentional process of collaboration where, mutual team performance, respect, trust, conflict resolution and motivation are maintained (O'Donovan et al., 2020).

Newman et al. (2017) and Edmondson (2004) have stated that psychological safety is loosely related and often confused with trust. The authors mentioned that the distinct difference is that trust deals with more how individuals feel about others, whereas psychological safety deals with the individual perception of how others will perceive them. Although trust is an important concept within the work environment, the distinct contrast between these concepts clarifies that psychological safety goes beyond trust as how individuals' perception of teams (Edmondson, 2004). This will determine how comfortable people are within those teams and this leads to them making valuable contributions, learning from their mistakes and growing which leads to increased performance.

2.6.3 Psychological Safety Levels

2.6.3.1 Individual Level

Psychological safety has been studied on three levels namely, organisational, group and individual level (Newman et al., 2017). Edmondson and Lei (2014) elaborated that research on psychological safety on an individual level relates more to outcomes such as work engagement and commitment, over and above task related outcomes. This has benefits on the overall team and organisation levels. Hybrid working environments can be perceived as a threat to team members as co-location collaboration may negatively impact members as it affects social identity and social exchange due to the feelings of isolation and rejection employees may experience.

This is supported by Alexander et al. (2020), the authors stated that it may be harder for team members to feel safe when they do not always work in the same location, and this takes away the ability to feel safe as the interpersonal relationships and team cohesion are limited. This view was critically explored by Brandsby et al. (2024) the authors discussed that exploring on an individual level facilitates a deeper understanding of these individuals as part of a team and how they relate to each other, additionally, this also creates a flow of information that leads to improved learning behaviour and performance.

2.6.4 Related Psychological Safety Behaviours

2.6.4.1 Communication/Safe to Contribute/Voice

Psychological safety is important for individuals as it creates an environment of clear and honest communication, and this empowers individuals with a space to freely express themselves and are comfortable to take risks. Open communication is considered important in fostering psychological safety. According to O'Donovan et al. (2020) focusing on developing and maintaining high-quality relationships and knowledge-sharing leads to improved team performance. Additionally, individuals who voice their views and contribute, experience autonomy and motivation which leads to increased commitment to their work (Charalampous et al., 2021; Peprah, 2023).

With the evolution of hybrid and virtual work environment, an intriguing approach was explored in measuring psychological safety. As digital Enterprise Communication Platforms (ECP) have become imperative in hybrid and virtual teams, a study conducted by Ferguson et al. (2024) stated that these platforms can be used as a data point to determine team collaboration, relationships and overall team performance. The outcomes of the study resolved that team members with low psychological safety communicated in a formal reticent manner whereas those with high psychological safety were vulnerable, and easily asked for help. Although there has been a high dependency on ECP platforms for communication in hybrid teams, the study only identified the differences and similarities between teams with high and low psychological safety (Ferguson et al., 2024). The limitation, however, is the absence of how to improve psychological safety in teams.

2.6.4.2 Trust

Trust and psychological safety can often be confused as trust is defined as a statement of confidence that the other party exposes themselves to vulnerability in relation to one another (Edmondson, 2004). A study by Khan (1990) revealed that interpersonal trust is essential and serves as an antecedent to psychological safety as it is believed that trust among team members facilitates psychological safety. However, a study by Alves et al. (2022) revealed that trust can be cultivated through the competency of fellow team members and leaders in hybrid teams. The study also validated the considerable dependence on electronic communication tools and their influence on trust (Alves et al., 2022).

As hybrid teams have developed, the literature confirms that mutual trust between leaders and followers is more essential due to their geographical dispersion. Nonetheless, there is a limited understanding of how trust is established and sustained in this environment (Chamakiotis et al., 2021).

2.6.4.3 Learning Behaviour

Learning behaviour encourages and creates psychological safety as individuals who feel psychologically safe are more prone to freely expressing their views, seeking feedback and taking accountability for their errors. The higher the presence of psychological safety, the better individuals become in developing their knowledge and skills (Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017).

2.6.4.4 Leadership

The concept of leadership in various contexts is extensively studied. Newman et al. (2017) reported that leadership has a direct relationship to psychological safety in organisations. It was stated that organisations that have a high-power distance demonstrate lower psychological power, therefore the style of leadership practised is imperative, as it directly influences the level of psychological safety in organisations (Remtulla et al., 2021). The author also reported that leadership styles such as change-oriented, ethical, and authentic leadership have a positive impact on creating high psychological safety. That ultimately creates corporate culture, team creativity, and innovation (Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023).

Transformational leadership exhibits behaviours conducive to psychological safety in the workplace (Fraizer et al., 2017). In the qualitative study conducted by Remulla et al. (2021), the findings in the study primarily focused on team-level outcomes, highlighting inclusive leadership as the dominant style that fosters psychological safety and promotes an inclusive and open culture. Remtulla et al. (2021), additionally, highlighted that team members also have a substantial influence on the facilitation of psychological safety. On the contrary, it is often argued that for this to happen, leaders must establish a psychologically safe environment then team members will follow suit.

2.7 Inclusive Leadership and Psychological Safety in Hybrid Teams in the Financial Sector

The relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological safety is significant. According to Shafaei and Nejati (2023), inclusive leadership has a good correlation with

psychological safety (Shafaei & Nejati, 2023). There is a clear indication that there is a positive relationship between inclusion, inclusive leadership and psychological safety. Individuals who feel psychologically safe, feel more included in the organisation and vice versa and these individuals are more prone to engage in feedback that may be perceived to be negative and risk-takers (Nguyen et al., 2023). Additionally, Detjen and Webber (2023) highlighted the importance of leaders reshaping work environments to give priority to employee involvement, inclusivity, and knowledge dissemination.

In a recent study conducted by Roberson and Perry (2022), where leaders participated in a qualitative study, revealed several notable behaviours. These behaviours included the development of a shared identity, the creation of communication and collaboration opportunities, and the establishment of shared power. This indicates the connection among the findings of studies addressing inclusive leadership behaviours and creating a psychologically safe environment for team members.

There are no reasonable strategies on how leaders can provide this environment and if there is a need to adapt these leadership behaviours however this is an existing gap as the hybrid working context is an emerging phenomenon with insufficient literature. Although there is a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological safety, how inclusive leadership behaviours can translate into psychological safety in hybrid teams remains unexplored (Woods et al., 2024). Therefore, it is imperative to explore this phenomenon, to further build on the inclusive leadership theory, as an emerging leadership style, including the specific leadership behaviours required to create psychological safety in hybrid teams.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on organisations and their employees, highlighting the need for leaders who can effectively manage relationships during this period of uncertainty (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). Workplace dynamics have undergone a significant shift due to COVID-19, resulting in three distinct sorts of modern working arrangements, namely: full-time in-office model, virtual working model and the most recent hybrid working model. Each of these working models has unique advantages and disadvantages. It is stated that from the differing working models, leaders play a critical role in managing team dynamics and relationships to improve performance in hybrid teams, with distinct benefits and challenges (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

Previous studies have also discovered that hybrid working models do not inherently facilitate specific organisational norms, such as organisational culture, trust, and a sense of belonging (Peprah, 2023). The successful implementation of hybrid working is being hindered by issues such as low psychological safety, leadership power dynamics, and a lack of adequate technology tools (Teng-Calleja et al., 2023; Peprah, 2023). This underscores the importance for leaders to promptly develop suitable methods to alleviate these issues, as they are crucial for attaining overall organisational objectives. Currently, it is unknown how leaders create inclusive environment in hybrid teams. (Beijer et al., 2024).

The lack of psychological safety in hybrid working has become a challenging phenomenon that both businesses and literature are struggling to articulate thoroughly (Peprah, 2023). Previous studies have stated the positive correlation between psychological safety and organisational outcomes such as performance (Fraizer et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017) and the existing research gap has become more important than ever as there is no clarity on how inclusive leadership creates psychologically safe environments in modern contexts. Additionally, digitalisation and technological infrastructure play a significant role in hybrid working environments, and this requires leaders who can adapt to change and influence the culture within organisations (Teng-Calleja et al., 2023).

The above literature review centred on inclusive leadership as a construct, and the typical behaviours exhibited by inclusive leaders that foster an inclusive environment. The research detailed the significance of communication as a catalyst for inclusivity. Highlighting how inclusiveness fosters a sense of belonging and eventually results in team members finding purpose in their work. The second construct, psychological safety, defined this construct and how it evolved. Additionally, the review elaborated on the facilitators, barriers, and outcomes associated with psychological safety. This literature review also highlighted the dynamics of psychological safety and inclusive leadership behaviours. As well as the apparent benefits and challenges experienced in the hybrid working environments. The literature review further demonstrated that the COVID-19 pandemic prompted organisations to seek strategies to assist employees considering the uncertainty in the workplace. Therefore, the gaps identified are practically how inclusive leaders can provide psychological safety in unprecedented times post-pandemic.

The literature review also detailed that followers feel free, and open to robust engagements and collaboration when they are led by inclusive leaders. Research has proven that inclusive leadership is crucial in fostering psychological safety where followers have the freedom to freely express themselves without any negative consequences (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Carmeli., 2010).

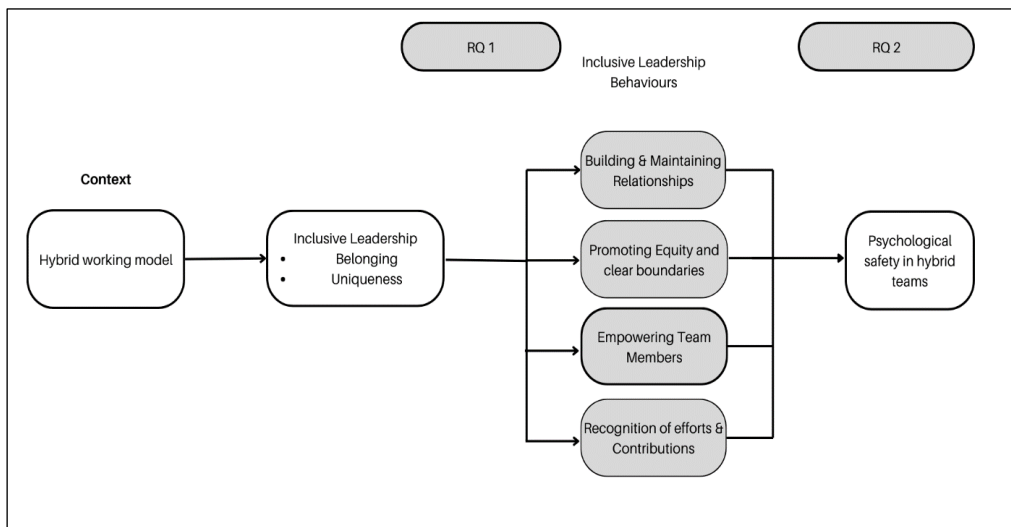
In conclusion, when inclusive leaders, create an inclusive space for their followers, it leads to psychological safety and outcomes such as innovation, creativity and performance (Newman et al., 2017; Carmel., 2010). However, the emergence of the hybrid working environment with its unique challenges, has created a gap in the body knowledge. This new context has created an unknown phenomenon that this research intends to explore (Shafaei & Nejati, 2023; Beijer et al., 2024)

Chapter 3: Research Questions

3.1 Conceptual Model

The objective of this research is to understand how inclusive leadership behaviours adapt to influence psychological safety in hybrid teams. The literature review in Chapter 2 examined contemporary hybrid work dynamics, subsequently conducting an in-depth analysis of inclusive leadership and associated behaviours. Subsequently, the construct of psychological safety was explored and the relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological safety in hybrid working teams was explored, which resulted in the discovery of research gaps. The following research questions originated from the literature review in accordance with the research objective outlined in Chapter 1.

Figure 2: Researcher's Conceptual Model



(Source: Researcher's Conceptual Model compilation, 2024)

Extensive prior research has been conducted on inclusive leadership and psychological safety theories and how inclusive leadership influences psychological safety in the workplace (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023). The emergence of hybrid work has presented a gap in the literature as the context has changed (Shafaei & Nejati, 2023). This study sought to explore the relationship between the two theories within the context of a hybrid work model, which has emerged as the prevailing standard in organisations. Inclusive leadership is recognised as a leadership approach that

can effectively tackle the organisational challenges that have emerged due to the pandemic (Beijer et al., 2024). It is crucial to understand how leaders have adapted and responded to the continuous changes in the working environment (Simmons & Yawson, 2022).

The researcher sought to understand how leadership behaviours have adapted to create inclusive environments in hybrid teams. The intention was to understand how this transition has enabled leaders to manage their teams while maintaining performance and the well-being of followers. Therefore, the objective of this study was to understand how leadership behaviours adapt to create inclusive hybrid teams. This led to the following research question:

RQ1: How do leaders adapt their behaviours to foster an inclusive environment in hybrid teams?

The researcher sought to explore the four inclusive leadership behaviours as stipulated in the literature review, and additionally how inclusive leadership fosters psychological safety in hybrid teams. The objective of this study was to understand how inclusive leadership behaviours influence psychological safety in hybrid teams. This led to the following research question:

RQ2: How does inclusive leadership influence psychological safety in hybrid teams?

The following chapter will delve into the methodological approach and detail the conduct of this study to address the above-mentioned research questions.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The objective of this research was to understand how inclusive leadership behaviours adapt to influence psychological safety in hybrid teams. Chapter 4 establishes the methodology and design choices employed to address the research questions presented in Chapter 3. The research methodology and design decisions were explored and rationalised regarding inclusive leadership and its influence on psychological safety in hybrid teams within the South African financial sector. The research adopted a qualitative approach, where 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with leaders and followers to gain insight into how inclusive leadership behaviours adapt to influence psychological safety in hybrid teams. After the completion of the data collection process, a brief overview of qualitative thematic analysis was discussed. Furthermore, ethical approval and the several quality controls and limitations of this research were described.

4.2 Research Methodology and Design

The purpose of this research was to understand how inclusive leadership behaviours adapt to influence psychological safety. The research considered the two constructs independently, inclusive leadership is currently an underexplored theory (Roberson & Perry, 2022 & Beijer et al., 2024) whereas psychological safety has been studied for decades since the emergence of the theory in the 1960's (Edmondson, 1999). Therefore, this study followed an explorative research design to gain insight into how inclusive leadership influences psychological safety in this new hybrid working phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This is supported by Saunders and Lewis (2018) and Creswell (2018), the authors state that an exploratory research approach is suitable for studies that have been underexplored.

This study adopted an interpretivism philosophy as it pertains to exploring a social phenomenon (Saunders and Lewis, 2018). An inductive approach was adopted for this study as the theory development was from the data analysis process, using a top-down approach (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The researcher found that the inductive approach is most appropriate as the new phenomenon of

hybrid working has limited empirical literature on how inclusive leadership influences psychological safety in hybrid teams (Beijer et al., 2024).

The study states that it is more suitable to be open to the unknown data outcomes as it will strengthen the two constructs, which will be valuable to business and literature.

The researcher conducted a mono-qualitative method to gather data for the research. The data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with 14 participants on Microsoft Teams. While the qualitative methodology has its disadvantages such as subjectivity the researcher ensured that the sampling instrument was rigorously to probe open-ended questions and gain valuable insight from participants. This method allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth and valuable information on how inclusive leadership behaviours adapt and foster psychological safety in hybrid teams (Conger, 1990; McCracken, 2011).

The researcher adopted a cross-sectional time horizon design, as it provided a synopsis for the research problem identified in Chapter 1. Both leadership and psychological safety scholars have proposed using longitudinal time horizon design, to gain deeper insight into how inclusive leadership adapts to foster psychological safety in hybrid teams (Conger, 1990; & Newman et al., 2017). However, this was not feasible for this study.

4.3 Population

Saunders and Lewis (2018) defined the population as the aggregate number of group members. The study explored the financial sector, which accounts for roughly 20% of the South African economy, with other businesses relying on its efficiency to uphold financial regulations, mitigate risk, and manage economic activities (COEFS, 2022). Consequently, knowledge workers in the financial sector significantly enhance the total South African workforce, and all factors influencing this sector were essential to address. Therefore, this study focused exclusively on knowledge workers in hybrid environments within the financial sector (Gashi et al., 2021).

4.4 Unit Of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study is noted as the lived experiences of participants (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). This study aimed to gain insight into the lived experiences of both leaders and followers from multiple organisations within the financial

sector on how inclusive leadership behaviours adapt and foster psychological safety in hybrid teams.

4.5 Sampling Method and Size

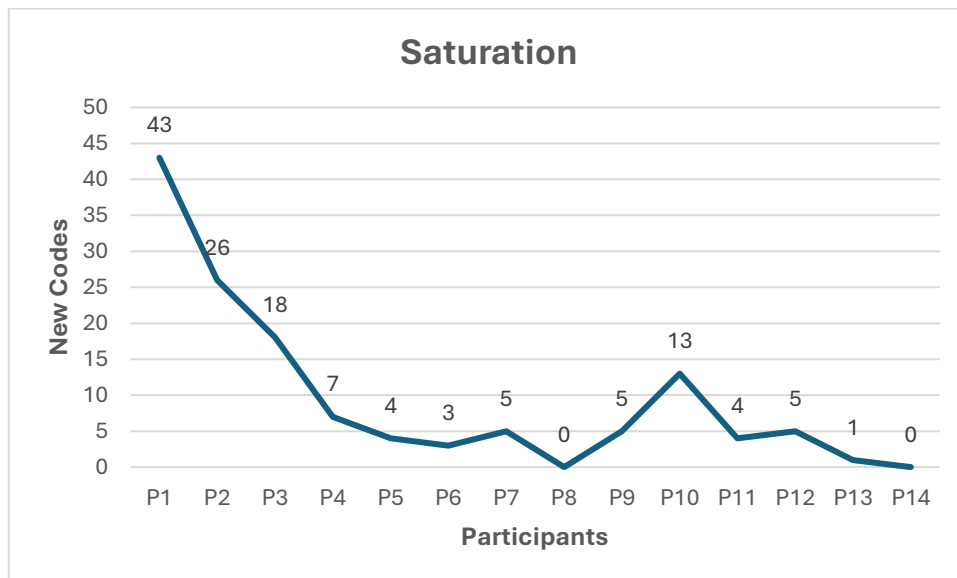
Saunders and Lewis (2018) characterised a sample as a collection of individuals from a certain population. This study concentrated on knowledge workers employed in the finance sector, and a criterion on those working in hybrid teams. This study utilised a purposeful, non-probability sampling method for the sample selection. The sample selection adhered to the predetermined criteria, which were knowledge workers in the financial sector who work in hybrid teams (Sanders & Lewis, 2018). The study concentrated on employees in hybrid teams, excluding those engaged in full-time office or remote work and individuals from industries other than the financial sector. The researcher utilised networks of MBA peers and other professional contacts to obtain willing participants who met the predetermined sampling criteria. The sample included senior managers, middle managers, junior managers and specialists within insurance and banking industries.

Qualitative sampling approaches prioritise appropriateness and adequacy (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). The sampling method for this study needed to be realistic and the sampling size to be sufficient to achieve the purpose of the research (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). In light of this research objective, the researcher prioritised these aspects throughout the data-gathering process. Qualitative research typically lacks a prescribed sample size, with many scholars proposing differing standards for sample sizes. Guest et al. (2006) made recommendations from several scholars, proposing a sample size ranging from 5 to 25 participants.

The researcher initially targeted a sample size of 20 individuals, comprising an average of six leaders and fourteen followers, to enhance the diversity of responses from followers to mitigate potential bias. However, this was not feasible due to saturation encountered by the researcher, which dictated a sample size of 14 participants, comprising seven leaders and seven followers as part of the data-gathering process. This approach was endorsed by O'Reilly and Parker (2013), who suggested that researchers frequently assess the adequacy of the sample size based on data saturation, defined as the point at which no new information is acquired from participants, rather than only on frequency.

The researcher adopted an inductive data-gathering process, conducting 14 interviews with individuals. Figure 3 below is a representation of the data saturation process and there is proof of a significant decline of new codes at Participant 8 and Participant 14 when the interview process was concluded. The justification for continuing after Participant 8, was the anticipation of new information and upholding credibility by maintaining to interview leaders and their fellow followers as the aim of the study was to obtain insights from both perspectives.

Figure 3: Data Saturation Process



(Source: Researcher’s Saturation compilation, 2024)

4.6 Measurement Instrument

The researcher deployed an interview guide (Annexure B) to gather data from the interviews for the data collection process. The guidelines established by scholars Saunders and Lewis (2018) were used to create the interview guide and to conduct semi-structured interviews proficiently. Saunders and Lewis (2018) characterised it as a data-gathering method in which an interviewer explores specific themes using probing questions in line with the questions outlined in Chapter 3. The alignment of the interview guide allowed for flexibility, it served the purpose of keeping the interviews focused on the research objective.

The researcher performed a pilot interview to validate the credibility of the interview

guide and to assess the formulation of the interview questions, participant comprehension, and probing techniques to ensure sufficient engagement and insight. The objective of this strategy was for the researcher to obtain valuable insight from the participants in the interviews. The findings of the pilot interview required the interviewer to be cautious of the pace while interviewing and to be clearer in how the questions were asked.

4.7 Data Gathering and Collection Process

Primary data

The data collection process commenced after obtaining Ethical Clearance. Upon securing ethical approval, the researcher engaged individuals within the MBA and professional networks to acquire appropriate contacts and arrange interview dates with those who were willing to participate in the research and fulfilled the selection criteria. Upon confirmation of interview dates, the researcher emailed participants with a consent form outlining specifics regarding audio recordings, voluntary participation, and confidentiality.

The researcher adhered to a guideline of the interview guide for all interviews, obtaining consent for audio recording and ensuring confidentiality. Due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, participants were afforded the chance to give unrestricted responses, which required unanticipated follow-up questions (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Beijer et al., 2024). However, the researcher exercised caution to ensure that the interview topics stayed focused and aligned with the research objectives. Each interview session was designated at 60 minutes max, and all interviews were completed within the allotted time.

Following the conclusion of the 14 semi-structured interviews, the transcription was executed by a transcriber for enhanced accuracy and efficiency. The researcher further refined each transcript to enhance reliability and ensure suitable data quality (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Upon completion of this process, the data analysis phase commenced, which is elaborated upon in the next chapter.

4.8 Data Analysis Approach

The researcher utilised a thematic analytical approach, a method for discovering, assessing, and reporting patterns in the collected data (Braun & Clark, 2006). The data analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti software. The six-step process described in previous studies scholars implemented, with flexibility aligned to the study topics and data collection, consistent with all qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

Step 1: This step involved the researcher getting acquainted with the data to ensure a fluid and clear analytical procedure.

Step 2: Initial codes were generated, followed by the consolidation of comparable codes.

Step 3: Codes were revised and organised into pertinent sub-themes and themes, The analysis and correlation between codes to establish themes were pioneered here.

Step 4: The codes, sub-themes, and themes were systematically checked in conjunction with the data to guarantee consistency and the requisite quality of the data analysis process.

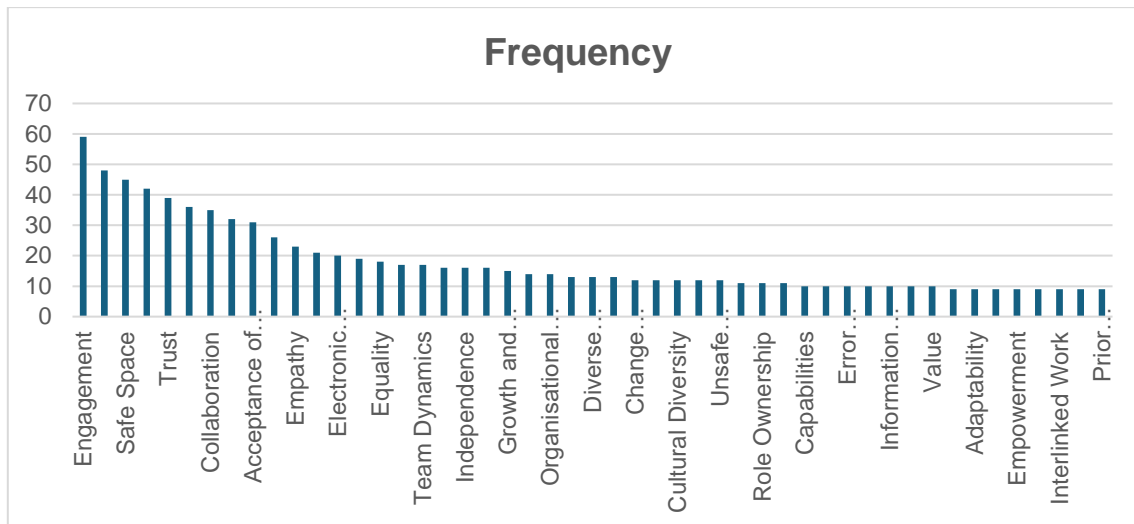
Step 5: The relevant themes and sub-themes were re-defined in accordance with the data patterns.

Step 6: The relevant themes and sub-themes derived from the findings of the research data were highlighted. A conceptual model was created from the collected data, illustrating the adaptability of inclusive leadership behaviours necessary to promote psychological safety in hybrid teams.

4.9 Coding Process

A thematic analysis was followed to analyse the data collected, and the process outlined. The data included a categorisation process that involved open, axial, and selective coding (Alhassan et al., 2023). During the inductive coding process, specifically in the phase of open coding, an initial total of 134 codes were generated after merging duplicated codes. As a result of the axial coding process, 7 sub-themes emerged through a consolidation process that involved refining codes and identifying distinct associations between these codes. Subsequently, selective coding was utilised to develop core themes in alignment with inclusive leadership and psychological safety within hybrid working teams. Consequently, 3 themes emerged from the codes, corresponding with the research questions and responses obtained from the interviews.

Figure 4: Frequency of Compilation of the Research Findings



(Source: Researcher’s Frequency compilation, 2024)

Figure 4 above illustrates an extraction of codes that exhibit the highest frequency, serving as a demonstration of the theme development process. The significance of the codes in relation to the research questions is clear in establishing the credibility of the data analysis process. The complete and detailed coding list and code frequency are included in Appendix D.

4.10 Quality Controls

Conformity and Dependability

The researcher utilised a multitude of quality control procedures. Upon verifying possible participants, the researcher ensured the selection criteria were confirmed with individuals. The researcher verified that participants were employed in the financial sector and operated in flexible hybrid contexts. A formal email confirmation with the interview details and consent was shared with the participants. Confirming that the participants fulfilled the research selection criteria guaranteed the collection of only credible data during the data-gathering process (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The quality of the data collected from participants was altered by data saturation. Upon

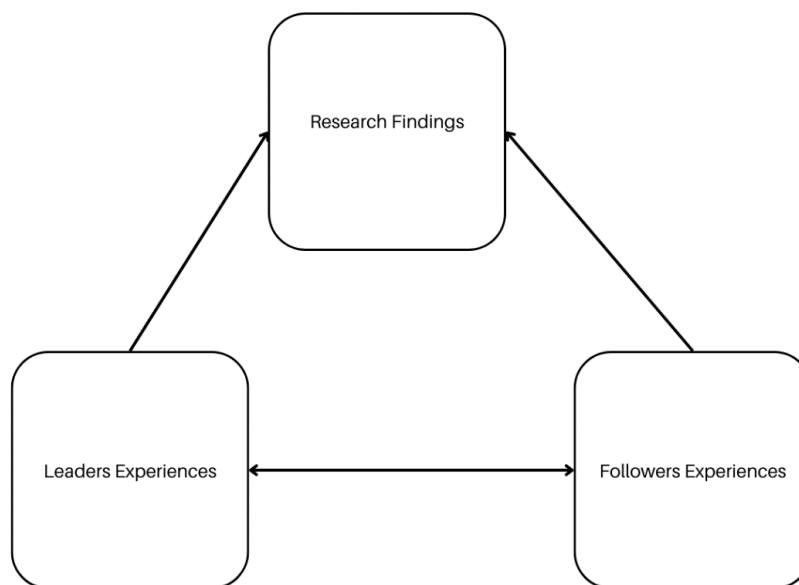
reaching data saturation with a sample size of N=14 and observing a notable decrease in new information, the semi-structured interviews were concluded (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). The researcher determined that it was essential for both the researcher and participants to ask follow-up questions when necessary. To ensure clarity, the researcher used a method of concisely summarising responses from participants after each question, allowing participants to rectify any misunderstandings with the researcher. Additionally, the researcher ensured that the findings were connected to the two research questions and objectives.

A distinct correlation was identified between the themes and the quotations created to validate the reliability of the data analysis procedure (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Data triangulation was utilised to enhance the reliability and validity of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research collected data from both leaders and followers to acquire diverse viewpoints on understanding how inclusive leadership adapts and fosters psychological safety in hybrid teams for a comprehensive understanding (Conger, 1990).

Figure 5: Data Triangulation



(Source: Researcher's Triangulation compilation, 2024)

Interviews were conducted with both leaders and followers from the same hybrid teams to guarantee that both viewpoints were considered for the same phenomenon

(Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Figure 3 above conceptualises the triangulation process that the research followed. During the data collection process, the researcher noted the insights from both viewpoints and established a link and a pattern of similarity in the inclusive leadership behaviours adapted within each team and their influence on psychological safety. The researcher employed this as a validation instrument to establish credibility and enhance the quality of the research. This research included both good and negative views and experiences to ensure a true representation of the findings, hence reaffirming its credibility.

Transferability and Generalisation

The researcher employed comprehensive and understandable descriptions of the themes in the analytical procedure to enhance the reality of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This ensured the accurate transfer of data into themes, devoid of ambiguity. This qualitative study emphasised the specific findings. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the findings may inform broader theories, industries, and contexts, as opposed to solely hybrid teams, which constitutes generalisation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4.11 Research Ethics

The researcher obtained ethical approval from the GIBS Ethical Committee after formulating a final interview guide (Annexure A & B) with the interview questions. Upon obtaining ethical approval, the researcher commenced with interviews, and participants were given the consent forms (Annexure C) outlining the research purpose and ensuring confidentiality.

4.12 Limitations

Semi-structured interviews facilitate probing questioning, which can pose challenges as it may lead participants to respond in a manner that aligns with the expectations set forth, necessitating careful consideration of how questions were posed and explored was imperative for the research (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). To address this limitation, after every interview conducted, reflections were made on possible bias, ensuring that all shortcomings were corrected and addressed in subsequent interviews.

An inductive analysis approach may restrict the research and introduce biases due to the possibility of the outcomes of the research reinforcing existing ideas. An example of this potential bias is the positive correlation identified between inclusive leadership and psychological safety in various studies. As well as the analysis of data in that direction presents a possible limitation (Frazier et al., 2017 & Newman et al., 2017). Conger (1990) & Newman et al. (2017) proposed that it is beneficial to employ a longitudinal research design to gather evidence over a prolonged timeframe for the leadership and psychological safety theories. However, this study determined that a cross-sectional research design would be the most suitable approach. This emerged as a constraint, as it eliminated the opportunity for data that could have yielded different outcomes.

Conger (1990) noted that interviews were frequently utilised for data collection, while observations can offer supplementary insights that may be beneficial for triangulation. This research employed semi-structured interviews as the main approach for gathering data. Saunders and Lewis (2018) noted that observation is generally employed to monitor actual individual behaviours, and observing how inclusive leaders cultivate a psychologically safe environment would have offered valuable insights for this research. The exclusion of observation from data collection restricted the possible findings of the research.

The sample consisted of 14 participants, encompassing seven leaders and seven followers who were interviewed, despite the initial target of 20 participants being a limitation of this research. The researcher argued that interviewing additional followers per leader could have yielded more insights and perspectives from other followers, thereby enriching the depth of this research.

4.13 Conclusion

A qualitative methodology process was used for this research, and a thorough comprehensive methodology was detailed in this chapter. The next chapter will present the findings from the data analysis process, mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Chapter Five: Research Findings

5.1 Introduction

The aim of Chapter 5 is to demonstrate the findings obtained from the data collection process detailed in Chapter 4. A brief background of the participants is detailed, and subsequently, the findings of the research are presented objectively. A semi-structured interview process was followed to obtain the relevant data, where 14 participants were engaged to gain a comprehensive insight into addressing the two research questions:

Research Question 1: How do leaders adapt their behaviors to foster an inclusive environment in hybrid teams?

Research Question 2: How does inclusive leadership influence psychological safety in hybrid teams?

5.2 Background of Participants

The researcher conducted interviews with 14 participants who are currently working in hybrid teams. These participants work with flexibility and are based on co-locations with team members, with some days in the office and others virtually. The interviews were conducted over five weeks, on Microsoft Teams. Background information of the participants is detailed in Table 1 below and the anonymity of participants has been maintained through the data analysis process. The table below indicates the participant codes, indicating whether they occupy a leadership or follower role, along with their role level and sector experience.

Table 1: List of Participants, Roles & Experiences

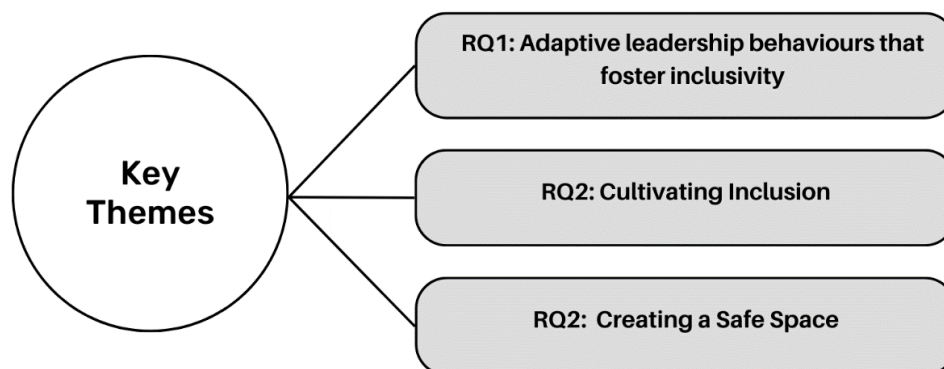
Participant Code	Leader/Follower	Sector Experience (Years)	Level
P1	Follower	19	Middle Management
P2	Follower	5	Middle Management
P3	Leader	13	Senior Management
P4	Follower	18	Specialist
P5	Leader	8	Middle Management
P6	Follower	9	Middle Management
P7	Follower	15	Middle Management
P8	Follower	5	Senior Administration
P9	Leader	10	Senior Management
P10	Leader	11	Senior Management
P11	Leader	15	Middle Management
P12	Leader	8	Middle Management
P13	Follower	30	Middle Management
P14	Follower	10	Specialist
Total years of experience		176 years	
Average years of experience		12.5 years	

The participants interviewed for this research have all worked for more than five years in the financial sector, collectively amassing a substantial 176 years of experience and an average number of 12,5 years of experience. This extensive background lends significant credibility to the insights gathered during the interviews, as these are seasoned professionals with a deep understanding of the financial sector. The participants include senior managers and those in senior administration roles, engaged in diverse functions such as sales, customer experience, compliance, and financial advisory. Notably, 75% of these individuals hold management positions, making the findings of this research particularly significant, as management plays a crucial role in influencing outcomes such as organisational cultures, psychological safety and performance (Alami et al., 2023).

5.3 Overall Research Findings

Participants were asked interview questions aligned to the two research questions derived in Chapter 3 findings below will be presented per research question.

Figure 6: Theme Compilation



(Source: Researcher's Key Themes compilation, 2024)

The analysis process resulted in the identification of three key themes, as depicted in Figure 5 and this chapter will detail the findings from this process. The main research themes emerging from the findings are namely: **Adaptive leadership behaviours** that foster **inclusivity**, **Cultivating inclusion** and **Creating a Safe Space**.

5.4 Research Question 1 Findings

RQ1: How do leaders adapt their behaviours to foster an inclusive environment in hybrid teams?

The objective of research question 1 was to understand how leaders have adapted their leadership behaviours to foster an inclusive environment in hybrid teams. Chapter 3 stipulated a consideration of how leaders have adapted their leadership behaviours in response to the emergence of the emerging hybrid working model, which seems to be the long-term preferred working arrangement following the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders must adapt their behaviours to thrive in complex and uncertain modern contexts while fostering inclusive environments. The researcher probed questions to both leaders and followers regarding their navigation of the hybrid working

environment and the approaches that leaders adopt to cultivate and manage teams within this context.

	Leader Development	5
	Relationship Management	32
Sub-theme 2: Fostering flexibility and communication	Electronic Communication Tools	20
	Trust	39
	Engagement	59
	Flexibility	17
	Decision-making	10
	Delayed Decision-making	3
	Openness	16
	Accessibility	9
Sub-theme 3: Intentional Inclusivity and Psychological Safety	Trust	39
	Distrusting	6
	Understanding	36
	Safe Space	45
	Value	10
	Intentionality	12
	Relationship Management	32
	Support	48
	Prior Mismanagement	9
	Connection Management	14

There were numerous lessons organisations learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, the value and importance of caring for the well-being of employees was vital and leaders were tasked with managing both performance and well-being. Noting the partial virtual and partial in-office set-up, leaders have shifted to varying leadership styles, where they are outcome-oriented, more empowerment-focused to foster inclusion and well-being and lastly to align with organisational cultures as organisations have evolved.

Shift towards outcome-oriented leadership approach

Leaders have made the shift towards outcome-oriented leadership in the hybrid setting, emphasising that team members who maintain autonomy to ensure that tasks and deliverables are achieved without interference from leaders. Below are illustrative quotes.

Participant 2 expressed satisfaction as a follower as the shift has become more focused on meeting deliverables: *"I'm actually quite satisfied ... the trend has moved towards delivery and getting the work done as opposed to being in the office."*

A leader, **Participant 9** supported this and stipulated that followers must coordinate their deliverables: *"I've said to everyone, manage your time, manage your deliverables."*

Shifting from a traditional management approach to a more empowering leadership approach

The modern working context has required leaders to shift from an authority-drive approach, towards a more empowering approach, where the well-being of followers has become pivotal in how they lead their teams. Leaders stated they were vocal in empowering followers by offering them support and opportunities for growth and independence.

Participant 5 stated as a leader the change and shift in leadership approach:

"My leadership approach is if you need anything, I'm here to support you and not to hinder your work or life."

This was supported by another leader, **Participant 3** who emphasised having confidence in her team:

“I think a key thing for me is that do not hold on to things too tightly. I've been confident enough to just let them, whether you pass or fail, just do it. Before, I'd be too scared that they would fail, and I would want to make sure they have a soft landing.”

Aligning leadership style with the organization's values and culture

Organisations have adopted values and cultures that are more aligned towards overall employee well-being by ensuring that employees have job satisfaction, and their needs are met, over and above the expectation of followers meeting performance deliverables. This has therefore prompted leaders to shift their leadership styles to align with the core values of organisations, to create the overall organisational culture.

Participant 3 expressed the difficulties as a leader adjusting to a different organisational culture from a more traditional environment, however, this current style has afforded authenticity for the leader.

“It was a difficult transition for me because I came from banking where if I'm going to meet you ... I'm going to get straight to the point. In insurance... they have that whole family [culture] ... I am adapting to the environment where I now must care about other people's feelings...I feel more authentic in my current leadership style.”

The relevance of aligning with organisational values and culture was further supported by a follower, **Participant 6**:

“The organisation has a flat structure. We all report them to her [manager]. We all have ambitions and expectations, and to be able to manage those in a way that keeps everyone happy is, one of the greatest, qualities that you need to lead in a space like this.”

5.4.1.2 Sub-Theme 2: Fostering Flexibility and Communication

The hybrid working environment required leaders to be adaptable and flexible in numerous unpredictable contexts, this included leaders understanding and demonstrating how to effectively manage their teams.

Flexibility and adaptability in different environments

Leaders have found themselves in a situation where they are involved in complex and unpredictable environments, this includes understanding their team dynamics and how to manage them.

This view is articulated by **Participant 6**, a follower who has witnessed their leader demonstrating situational flexibility:

“Being able to code switch, [to] be able to apply herself in various contexts is what makes her an inclusive leader. ”

Participant 1 supported this view, as a follower who explained that their leader facilitated a process of adapting and understanding them to effectively manage a now, well-functioning team:

“We had to adapt to her, and she [had to] adapt to us, and it all came to a common ground. And now it works.”

Increased use of technological tools for communication and decision-making

The limited face-to-face interactions has led to organisations relying on technological tools to foster communication and effective decision-making. Leaders cultivated ways of engaging with team members, to ensure that communication is streamlined with quick turnaround times.

A leader, **Participant 11** stated that technological tools provide quick and fast responses to attend to work-related matters.

“If there's an issue, let me know immediately. Our messages come through on our WhatsApp group, the speed of communication helps a lot.”

This was supported by another leader, **Participant 9**, who emphasised the importance of being easily accessible to followers.

“They send me Teams messages while I'm in meeting. I will respond to them. So that accessibility is important.”

Not everyone agreed with this. Some participants expressed the challenges of delayed decision-making and slow information sharing. Now, leaders have become less accessible, as they do not provide quick responses when required and this has impacted meeting work deliverables in a timely manner.

Participant 1, a follower stated how the limited information sharing has impacted the ability to promptly make decisions:

“If you need information, I can't just stand up and go to that person's desk and say ... I need your help. You must give them a call, send them a message, or set up a meeting...[Therefore], it might take time to make certain decisions”.

This view is supported by another follower **Participant 2**, who shared how the inaccessibility of leaders has impacted decision-making

“...it is sometimes trickier to get things resolved specifically when you need one or two specific senior decision-makers it can get tricky to get them into the room to make decisions.”

5.4.1.3 Sub-Theme 3: Intentional Inclusivity and Psychological Safety

Leaders have intentionally fostered inclusivity and psychological safety as a strategy to ensure that followers maintain a sense of belonging in safe team environments. By implementing these strategies leaders have ensured that regardless of the co-location context, effective team dynamics are not impacted, and followers continue to feel included.

Prioritising inclusivity

Leaders have recognised potential issues such as followers operating in silos and a lack of transparency and openness within organisations. Consequently, leaders have developed strategies, such as scheduling days when all team members need to be present, to ensure the preservation of both formal and informal team inclusion. Furthermore, leaders have created secure environments for followers to articulate their perspectives and opinions concerning matters that directly affect them.

A leader, **Participant 5**, stated that the decision for the entire team to go to the office on specific days is to ensure that followers do not feel disengaged and without support:

"I think the decision to go to the office once a week fosters inclusivity, [so you feel that] you're not alone".

This view is supported by **Participant 10**, who stated that through honest, transparent and open conversations, followers have a platform to freely express themselves on issues that concern them:

"I've tried to be as inclusive as possible. When were told to work in a hybrid form, I set up a session with my direct reports and then with a broader team to create a space for them to air their views and fears."

Intentional relationship building

Participants expressed that intentional relationship building has become a priority for leaders, as the current working context prioritises employee well-being. Leaders have intentionally ensured that they engage with followers on both a personal and professional level, as a demonstration of care and concern towards the overall well-being of followers. Additionally, leaders have cultivated relationships with followers, where they can have open and honest conversations when work-related issues arise.

A leader, **Participant 10** elaborated on the importance of deliberate relationship-building through subtle yet impactful actions:

"If you're not going to spend time with people, it's very difficult to build a relationship with them and you must be deliberate [about it]. Whether it is scheduling a ten-minute

quick coffee session with somebody to [regularly] touch base with them... on things that are not just work-related."

Another perspective is emphasised by a follower, **Participant 13**, who stated that a solid relationship with leaders, creates room for transparency, trust and openness:

"We have a solid relationship with my line manager ... We have that trust relationship where she will call me and say, I just had an interesting conversation [with my subordinates]. What's going on"

Intentionally developing psychological safety

Participants expressed the value of psychological safety in teams, and the crucial role of leaders, who deliberately encourage followers to freely speak up when they have concerns and whenever they require support from a professional and personal perspective.

Participant 8, a follower articulated that leaders provide a platform for free and open discussions:

"He is [manager] always saying, if you [need] anything, please come discuss it with me ... My door is always open." This view is supported by **Participant 5**, a leader who follows the same approach of encouraging followers to freely speak:

"I have a very open-door policy. I'm always asking them to reach out if they need any assistance ... when they do need assistance, I try to be of assistance. When you have personal life problems, please feel free to communicate that life happens to all of us."

In contrast, a leader **Participant 3**, argued that despite intentional efforts for leaders to strive and develop psychological safety in teams, not all followers will be receptive to their approach, therefore leaders should accept and understand the imperfections and shortcomings of the teams they lead:

"However, we are also human. As much as I can try to create a safe space, I may think that we are all safe, but you might have one or two people that are maybe ... safe today, but tomorrow [they are] not that safe ... Because I know I'm not perfect as an individual, I cannot expect everything to be perfect with my team."

Rebuilding trust and psychological safety following leadership deficiencies

A notable perspective shared by leaders was the critical task they had in rebuilding trust in the teams, following leadership deficiencies from previous leadership. This required leaders to intentionally develop strategies of trust and psychological safety with followers.

Participant 9, a leader highlighted the extensive dedication and work it took to regain trust and psychological safety throughout the team:

"I came into a team that was quite wounded ... psychological safety is not a thing that my predecessor drove. There was a lot of repairing that one needed to do because trust had disintegrated to a point where even the team members did not trust of each other."

This view is supported by **Participant 10**, who iterated a similar experience as a leader:

"It took a lot of work... as the team almost had... what is it when you fall in love with your kidnapper? Because previously every two years they had instability, there was restructures... they were treated like numbers. There was very low trust, actually, animosity and a need to fight about the smallest things."

The findings of research question 1 demonstrated how leaders transitioned and adapted to unfamiliar hybrid team contexts, by adopting leadership approaches that focused on trust building, communication, fostering inclusivity and psychological safety while maintaining an agile way of working. This has enabled leaders to maintain inclusivity in hybrid teams

Table 3: Summary of Findings of Research Question 1

RQ1: How do leaders adapt their behaviours to foster an inclusive environment in hybrid teams?	
Theme 1: Adaptive leadership behaviours that foster inclusivity	
Sub-Themes:	Key Findings
Sub-Theme 1: Shifting and evolving leadership approaches	The transition to hybrid working has prompted leaders to adjust how they lead teams, this has required the exploration of leadership styles such as outcome-oriented leadership and empowering leadership. Additionally, leaders had to ensure their leadership styles were aligned with the organisational values and cultures.
Sub-Theme 2: Fostering flexibility and communication	Due to the limited visibility of followers, leaders had to learn to adapt to varying contextual environments. Additionally, with the hybrid work models, leaders have had to foster a culture of timeously decision-making and accessibility with followers using technological tools. This, however, was a challenge to some followers, as the use of have increased use of technological tools for communication, as delayed decision-making where leaders are inaccessible.
Sub-Theme 3: Intentional inclusivity and psychological safety	Leaders prioritise inclusivity through intentional relationship building and intentionally developing psychological safety within hybrid teams. This is through continuous engagement and encouragement for followers to freely express themselves and their concerns.

5.5 Research Question 2 Findings

RQ2: How does inclusive leadership influence psychological safety in hybrid teams?

The aim of research question 2 was to understand how inclusive leadership influences psychological safety in hybrid teams. As stipulated in Chapter 3, following the COVID-19 pandemic, a relational leadership style such as inclusive leadership is relevant in cultivating psychological safety in hybrid teams. The researcher reflected on how inclusive leadership fosters a sense of belonging and value for uniqueness within hybrid teams. Therefore, the researcher asked both leaders and followers questions on how leaders demonstrate inclusivity and further to that, how psychological safety is fostered through inclusive leadership. Table 4 below shows the identified themes that were developed according to the findings from the participants in the interviews conducted, which were based on research question 2.

Table 4: Research Question 2 Thematic Map

Main theme	Sub-theme	Key codes	Frequency of codes
Theme 2: Cultivating Inclusion	Sub-theme 1: Fostering a sense of belonging	Value	10
		Respect	5
		Transparency	4
		Belonging	7
		Relationship Management	32
		Honesty	6
		Trust	39
		Engagement	59
		Performance Management	42
		Check-ins	13
		Social Engagement	13
		Fairness	3
		Equality	18
	Sub-theme 2: Creating Value for Uniqueness	Problem-solving	4
		Constructive Feedback	19
		Engagement	59
		Growth and Development	15
		Clear Expectations	12
		Decision-making	10
		Delayed Decision-making	3
		Risk Taking	16
Diverse Prospects		13	
Diverse Skills		7	
Support	9		

		Room to improvement on recognition	6
	Sub-theme 3: Recognition of Efforts and Contribution	Structural and Informal Recognition	36
		Support	48
		Value	10
		Intentionality	12
		Performance Management	42
		Performance Driven	9
		Corrective Behaviour	7
Theme 1: Creating a Safe Space	Sub-theme 1: Creating a Climate for Psychological Safety	Constructive Feedback	19
		Safe Space	45
		Conflict Resolution	2
		Trust	39
		Encouragement	9
		Engagement	59
		Connection Management	14

This researcher explored inclusive leadership and asked participants probing questions in this regard. Subsequently, the researcher posed probing questions to participants regarding psychological safety; therefore, the findings of this research findings will be presented in the same method.

5.5.1 Theme 2: Cultivating Inclusion

Participants were vocal about how leaders demonstrate inclusive leadership in their teams. To capture the views expressed by participants, three sub-themes were developed namely, fostering a sense of belonging, creating value of uniqueness and recognition of efforts and contributions.

5.5.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Fostering a Sense of Belonging

Creating an environment where everyone feels valued and respected

One aspect of fostering a sense of belonging in teams is creating an environment where team members feel valued and respected. Participants expressed that leaders cultivate an environment for honesty, respect and value across all levels of their teams. The demonstration includes allowing all team members space to contribute valuably to their teams.

This view is expressed by **Participant 13**, a follower who stated that the three key values that are the foundation of creating a sense of belonging for team members:

“But as I say, the three key values in our business that drive inclusivity is honesty, respect and trust, and is filtered across the team.”

Participant 2, a follower supported this view and stated that when all team members are provided an opportunity to contribute, they have a sense of belonging:

“... Giving everyone an opportunity to contribute is... part of respecting and valuing someone ... as we know that we're all experts ... in the team, [and] we can all contribute [from] what we're seeing in the business.”

Building trust and promoting open communication

Participants further highlighted the important role trust and open communication play in fostering belonging, where leaders demonstrate transparency and openness to cultivate a culture of trust.

Participant 11, emphasised the crucial role communication plays in fostering trust: *“There's an open line of communication and it's deeply rooted within trust.”*

This view is supported by **Participant 14**, a follower, who expressed how their leader demonstrates trust to foster a sense of belonging in teams:

“As much as she expects high performance, she fosters open, honest and transparent communication.”

Building Relationships

Participants noted that leaders fostered and strengthened relationships by cultivating a sense of community through regular check-ins. It was found that conducting regular check-ins facilitates more efficient work and collaboration with followers. This practice demonstrated by leaders, ensures that followers do not work in silos and encourages them to provide support to one another.

Conduct regular check-ins

Participant 5, a leader expressed that conducting regular check-ins, ensures transparency in the team as their roles are interrelated:

“That's why also these weekly sessions are important because as much as everybody is an expert in what they do... [we all have] very different roles. There is still a connection between all of us where we come together in these team sessions and just give each other an update... I do one-on-one updates, but we also do these weekly, just the entire team.”

A leader, **Participant 3**, supported this strategy and expressed the importance of maintaining these check-ins, to ensure that both the leader and fellow followers are aware of what others are doing, to avoid key-man dependency:

“Our team meetings, on Mondays and Fridays include the whole team. I tried to make sure that the whole team is involved, as I can't afford to have a key man dependency anymore.”

Equity

Participants underlined that a sense of equity is produced when leaders treat followers equally and foster ongoing collaboration with them. This demonstration fosters a sense of belonging among followers since they are treated the same as their fellow team members by their leaders.

This view was emphasised by a follower, **Participant 1**, on how their leader demonstrates equity in their team:

“ She does not enforce the hierarchy by saying, “I'm the manager. You need to react in a certain way or do things in a certain way... She sees all of us as equal, and we all work together to a specific goal.”

Participant 7, a follower further supported this view, indicating how their leader engages team members fairly:

“She achieves that by making sure that she has transparent relationships with everyone, engages with everyone, and is fair to everyone.”

5.5.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Creating Value for Uniqueness

This sub-theme emerged from explanations of participants, regarding the strategies leaders use to solicit uniqueness from followers to promote inclusion within teams. Leaders have adopted deliberate and effective strategies to empower followers, enhance team cohesion, and enhance contributions within teams.

Empowerment

Participants indicated that leaders fostered a sense of empowerment by promoting follower independence through deliberate coaching. Furthermore, leaders facilitated growth and development by allowing followers the opportunity to enhance their skills and acquire useful experience. Leaders cultivated a sense of empowerment by exhibiting exceptional interpersonal abilities, articulating clear expectations, and promoting diverse perspectives from followers. Lastly, participants emphasised that leaders

possess a unique ability to solicit knowledge, by fostering collaboration towards common goals.

Enabling team members to be independent when problem-solving

Participant 2, a follower emphasised that the promotion of autonomy by leaders has enabled followers to strive towards independence in resolving problems:

“Having freedom to do work as we choose...has been very beneficial. It pushes members to be more independent, more critical, and more problem-solving oriented...They coach intentionally for greater independence and critical engagement.”

This was emphasised by a leader, **Participant 3**, who stated the importance of encouraging and supporting followers to remain independent, regardless of the outcome:

“Whether you say the right thing or the wrong thing, just keep going, I'm going to support you.”

Providing opportunities for growth and development

A leader, **Participant 5**, stated followers are provided with opportunities to advance their skills within the team, which has fostered growth and development:

“And then there's also an opportunity to cross-skill and learn in areas that you would like to explore further. You must be outstanding in your current role before you can go and shadow in another space.”

This view was supported by a follower, **Participant 14**, who explained how leaders empower and support them to challenge themselves by gaining valuable experience:

“She [manager] allows you to gain experience and to just take a stab at it, give it your best shot.”

Excellent communication skills, including setting clear expectations and encouraging feedback

Participant 13, a follower, expressed that leaders provide platforms for clear communication on work expectations and further encourage feedback, to ensure that followers feel included in the development of the outlined team goals:

“You could never feel included unless you clearly understand what is expected to you, which means contracting ... at the beginning of the year, contracting with clarity, not just in terms of figures, but also timelines and frequency. Communicating during contracting and providing clarity is a solid foundation for you to feel included, for you to be trusted.”

This was supported by **Participant 11**, a leader, who indicated that followers respond positively when leaders provide structure and clarity of expectations upfront,

“So just setting a clear structure with clear expectations which results in having staff who are happy and comfortable”

Collaboration through drawing out expertise

Participant 10, a leader noted that considering the unique differences of team members, leaders intentionally encourage leveraging off each other’s strengths to cultivate seamless collaboration towards common goals:

“We are more likely to collaborate and leverage off of each other’s strengths”

This view is supported by a follower, **Participant 14**, who stated that leaders are exceptional at identifying strengths within teams to meet common goals:

“She can identify strengths and weaknesses and... when there is a piece of work that needs to be done, she would identify the different deliverables by way of each person’s strengths.”

5.5.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Recognition of Efforts and Contribution

Ultimately, it emerged that leaders regularly acknowledge the efforts of followers. These leaders have exhibited recognition through official organisational structures, as well as through informal personal encounters. This appreciation acts as a morale booster for followers and encourages them to sustain exceptional performance.

Celebrating wins and acknowledging effort through both formal and informal channels

In the interview process, the researcher noted the positive expression from **Participant 7**, a follower as they articulated with a great sense of acknowledgement, how crucial it is when leaders express recognition for the dedication they demonstrate:

"She invited me to speak about the vision at the conference ...I think she said it to the whole world...these are things didn't matter to me, but I think when she said it, I felt it. I felt it was a serious acknowledgement."

Additionally, **Participant 10**, a leader supported this view, and further elaborated that it is important to be specific in how you recognise followers, to ensure that reinforcement of adherence to procedures is maintained:

"I told her she must tell him, thank you so much that you paid attention to and used the [checklist] and double checked your contracts. You are reinforcing the behaviour you want to see."

Participant 12, a leader argued contrasting views, where they stated that leaders should continuously improve on how they reflect with followers on achievements, instead of simply moving on to the next work deliverable:

"We should always strive to better at how we celebrate the wins of team members because our wins look quite different. And sometimes a very simple thing can become quite complex and then it gets done and we just move on to the next project."

5.5.2 Theme 3: Creating a Safe Space

5.5.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Create a Climate for Psychological Safety

The majority of participants indicated that they work in psychologically safe environments, where they feel liberated to express themselves and engage in feedback dialogues with their leaders and team members, therefore promoting collaboration and

participation. Furthermore, participants indicated that leaders addressed concerns and errors with empathy and understanding towards their followers.

Creating an open and inclusive environment where everyone feels comfortable speaking up without fear of retribution

Participant 11, a leader explained that leaders foster psychological safety by cultivating an environment, where followers feel free to be open and to speak up without negative consequences:

“I feel safe and comfortable... and there's no attack on me as a person. I'm not being forced in any direction. I am comfortable in saying, I can connect with this person, I can relate to this person.”

This view was further supported by **Participant 1**, a follower who affirmed psychological safety in their working environment that was promoted by leaders:

“At the moment, I think this is a good space for us. We are allowed or able to express our views and say what we need to say. And without feeling, that I am going to be victimized because my view is different.”

However, **Participant 13**, a leader had contrasting views and argued that although leaders intentionally cultivate psychological safety, followers may not all respond positively towards their approach:

“You have to be deliberate to foster [psychological safety], because I want to believe that the moment you go below threshold of a healthy level of psychological safety, you lose trust.”

Responding to mistakes and concerns with empathy and understanding

Participant 10, a leader emphasised that it is crucial to engage followers with humanity and empathy to ensure thorough engagement:

“So just making sure that there's full engagement from your team, that your team has a safe space, making sure that you show up with empathy, because we are all human.”

This view was supported by **Participant 1**, a follower who that stated leaders positively discuss areas of improvement and facilitate rectification when errors occur:

“If something doesn't go right or we made mistakes, we have the tough conversations, and then we move on and we fix it.”

Use feedback for dialogue

A leader, **Participant 5**, expressed the importance of feedback as it provides an opportunity to engage in dialogue where growth is encouraged:

“You have to receive feedback, whether it's great feedback or negative feedback, there's always room for growth and conversation when receiving not-so-great feedback.”

Another leader, **Participant 9** emphasised the value of encouraging dialogue, as it provides an opportunity to gain different perspectives and views, which results in shared outcomes:

“There's a lot of debate and discussing of different views. Half the time, my view [Manager] is out voted, the collective sense comes in and we go with that.”

This perspective was challenged by **Participant 3**, a leader, who argued the importance of limiting consistent dialogue, as it may result in “too much of a good thing”, where followers may have a reliance on others, and have limited independent reasoning:

“I have those open discussions with my team members, and I asked them to be open as well but sometimes it becomes too when they want to run every little thing by me”

The research findings for research question 2 revealed the essential role that trust-building, open communication, continual participation, and feedback play in fostering inclusion within hybrid teams. Furthermore, these acts have fostered a climate of psychological safety, wherein followers are afforded environments that emphasise open and honest communication without adverse repercussions, and where their concerns

and mistakes are addressed with empathy and understanding. Additional information regarding the key findings is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 5: Key Finding of Research Question 2

RQ2 How does inclusive leadership influence psychological safety in hybrid teams?	
Theme 2: Cultivating Inclusion	
Sub-theme	Key Findings
Sub-theme 1: Fostering a Sense of Belonging	To foster a sense of belonging, leaders have created environments where followers feel valued and respected. Leaders prioritised building trust and promoting open communication with followers. Additionally, they focused on building relationships while maintaining equity in their teams. Leaders intentionally demonstrated these approaches to cultivate inclusion within their teams.
Sub-theme 2: Creating Value for Uniqueness	Leaders also demonstrated ways of creating value for uniqueness by empowering followers through, enabling team members to be independent when problem-solving and providing opportunities for growth and development. Additionally, leaders demonstrated encouraging feedback and expectational clear communication, while drawing on each other's expertise to improve collaboration.
Sub-theme 3: Recognition of Efforts and Contribution:	Leaders utilise recognising and acknowledging team members efforts to build the confidence of followers and to reinforce the value in meeting deliverables. Additionally, some participants expressed concern that leaders should consciously and deliberately recognising achievement before simply moving on to the next deliverable.
Theme 3: Psychological Safety: Creating a Safe Space	
Sub-theme: Create a Climate for Psychological Safety	Leaders demonstrated that they create open and inclusive environments where everyone feels comfortable speaking up without fear of retribution. Additionally, leaders have been continuously aware of responding to mistakes and concerns with empathy and understanding while encouraging feedback and dialogue with follower. Although concerns of a lack of independence was raised by some participants, majority of the followers, concurred with the importance of open dialogue.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented three key themes, and seven sub-themes extracted from the thematic data analysis of the 14 semi-structured interviews. The findings corresponded with the research questions set in Chapter 3. This chapter presented findings aimed at fulfilling the research objective.

The findings revealed that leaders were compelled to shift their leadership styles towards more agile and relational approaches, that embrace flexibility and communication, deliberate inclusivity, and psychological safety to create an inclusive work environment for their followers. The findings further demonstrated the essential role leaders have in fostering a sense of belonging and appreciation for the uniqueness of their followers. This can be achieved by transparent communication, building trust, empathetic understanding, and ongoing engagement. Leaders have the responsibility to create and promote psychological safety for followers in hybrid teams. The findings of this study demonstrated the significance of relational leadership, particularly inclusive leadership, wherein deliberate accessibility, availability, and openness from leaders can create a psychologically safe environment. The findings of this research will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Research Findings

This chapter explores the findings outlined in Chapter 5 concerning the research aim and objectives. The chapter will present the novel findings alongside the literature.

6.1. Research Question 1

How do leaders adapt their behaviours to foster an inclusive environment in hybrid teams?

The first research question sought to explore how leaders have adapted their behaviours to foster inclusivity within hybrid working teams. This was particularly relevant considering the emergence of hybrid working post the COVID-19 pandemic. As well as the reliance on leaders to foster well-being and inclusiveness while balancing performance, following the lessons learned during the pandemic (De Vincentzi et al., 2022). Subsequently, there is a need to understand how leadership behaviours have been adapted using existing literature (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Beijer et al., 2024).

Hybrid working models became common post-COVID-19, during which many knowledge workers shifted to full-time remote work due to restrictions imposed by the World Health Organization (De Vincentzi et al., 2022). Gashi et al. (2021) noted that while virtual working environments can offer advantages, they can also have a significant impact on employee well-being. Consequently, organisations should ensure that the hybrid work experience is fulfilling to balance both performance and well-being, as it is likely to remain a long-term arrangement (Teng-Calleja et al., 2023).

As a majority of organisations have adapted well to hybrid working, scholars have suggested the need to explore research opportunities on how leaders can adapt their behaviours to manage hybrid teams effectively (Simmons & Yawson, 2022; Beijer et al., 2024). This study sought to address this call, and three key findings emerged. From this research, aligned with three key sub-themes: Leaders shifted their leadership approaches; promoted flexibility and communication and were intentional about facilitating inclusivity as well as psychological safety. The interplay among these three sub-themes will be evaluated from a theoretical standpoint below.

6.1.1 Theme 1: Adaptive Leadership behaviours that foster inclusivity

6.1.1.1 Sub-theme: Shifting in leadership approaches

Outcome-orientated leadership approach

Participants in this research indicated that leaders had transitioned to an outcome-oriented approach, characterised by employees not being micromanaged, to create a culture of flexibility and autonomy. Supporting literature indicates that leaders who use an outcome-oriented leadership strategy foster autonomy, allowing individuals to maintain a clear sense of control over their work and enhancing their adaptability (Peprah, 2023). The findings demonstrate that followers valued the trust leaders placed in them to assume responsibility for their jobs and fulfil their obligations. Additionally, literature indicates that organisations and leaders have developed policies in support of this outcome-oriented approach, as a demonstration of the extent to which leaders trust and empower employees to be autonomous (Teng-Calleja et al., 2023).

This transition has enabled followers to focus on their work and take ownership in their work obligations while ensuring the delivery of satisfactory performance rather than prioritising in-office visibility as a performance metric. The literature further states that the presence of autonomy in these teams enables followers to increase their job commitment and establish challenging objectives, resulting in improved overall team performance (Charalampous et al., 2021). The research findings further indicated that leaders have consistently held followers accountable by requiring them to meet their work obligations, particularly external stakeholder expectations regardless of the flexible environment. Furthermore, the literature indicates that it is advantageous for leaders to enable their team members to self-manage and assume accountability for their performance, as continuous oversight might be difficult in hybrid environments (Bell et al., 2022).

The research findings corroborate existing literature indicating that as the business climate changes and presents unanticipated challenges, leaders increase the autonomy for their followers. They also focus on outcomes, rather than visibility while cultivating inclusive hybrid teams.

Empowering leadership approach

The research findings indicated that the emergence of the modern work environment has necessitated that leaders transition from a traditional authoritative approach to leadership, characterised by hierarchical principles within teams. Supporting literature indicates that leaders who use the traditional hierarchical leadership model have been found to lack skills that foster engagement, as they are homogenous to their followers (Simmons & Yawson, 2022). Therefore, the research findings of this study indicate that leaders have adopted a more empowering approach with their followers. These leaders demonstrate their support and facilitate growth for their followers. Additionally, the research findings indicate that leaders encourage followers to contribute their varied talents and expertise towards achieving shared objectives.

Supporting literature indicates that leaders empower followers by promoting their participation and exhibiting their unique skills and expertise, intending to achieve shared objectives (Randel et al., 2018). Contradicting literature states that leaders are lacking in their ability to provide emotional support to followers in hybrid teams, which hinders team dynamics and performance (Teng-Calleja et al., 2023). However, the findings of this study support the literature by Randel et al. (2018) and state that leaders have adopted a more empowering approach towards followers where participation and collaboration are encouraged to create belonging for followers.

Additionally, Randel et al. (2018) stated that the empowering leadership style does not display behaviours that promote inclusion; rather, it is used as a power neutraliser with followers to boost their morale and give them the ability to make their own decisions. The researcher contends that while literature indicates that empowering leadership fosters independence and control among followers regarding work-related obligations, the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the value of interpersonal relations, where both work-related needs and intrinsic needs are met (Bell et al., 2022; Teng-Calleja et al., 2023; Peprah, 2023). The researcher argues that the behaviour exhibited by leaders in these findings promotes inclusivity, as leaders have demonstrated inclusivity and driving performance in teams. Consequently, the researcher argues that, given the emergence of hybrid working teams, the definition of empowering leadership style warrants more exploration, as the definition contradicts the empowerment aspect inherent in inclusive leadership behaviours.

6.1.2 Fostering Flexibility and Communication

6.1.2.1 Increased reliance on technology communication tools

Participants reported that the lack of direct physical contact hindered overall communication. Consequently, leaders have established a substantial reliance on technology as the primary means of communication. Moreover, supporting literature states that fostering social and professional interactions necessitates the proactive and deliberate use of electronic communication tools by leaders and followers to alleviate feelings of isolation (Charalampous et al., 2021). Participants revealed that leaders deliver prompt responses and maintain accessibility to their followers. Platforms such as Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp facilitate communication, hence streamlining decision-making as leaders prioritise accessibility to followers, ensuring that no barriers impede the fulfilment of collective team objectives. This is corroborated by Bell et al. (2022), the author emphasized the significance of leaders ensuring that followers have equal access to technological tools and encourage participation and engagement on these platforms.

Several participants highlighted that group chat-oriented platforms have been essential for fostering ongoing formal and social interactions among team members and leaders while complying with the engagement guidelines established by leadership. This is supported by Ferguson et al. (2024), the author stated that enterprise communication platforms have become pivotal in maintaining team cohesion and overall performance. Conversely, other participants argue that reliance on technological tools has become an obstacle. These participants indicated that the exchange of information and decision-making involving leaders has become increasingly challenging. Participants observed that communication with peers and subordinates was more effortless however, access to leaders was limited. This study corroborates the literature by Bell et al. (2022), Charalampous et al. (2021), and Chamakiotis et al. (2021) regarding the necessity for leaders to intentionally promote engagement through technological tools, demonstrating exceptional communication and fostering trust, which is vital for success (Cheng et al., 2015; Gashi et al., 2021).

While participants presented different opinions of the effectiveness of technology for communication, the researcher observed that only a minority expressed these concerns. This

indicates that overall leaders have successfully embraced and implemented technology within teams to enhance performance.

6.1.3 Prioritizing Inclusivity and Psychological Safety

6.1.3.1 Intentional Relationship Building

Participants highlighted a significant challenge, which is limited engagement among team members resulting from diminished physical face-to-face interaction. This has compelled leaders to prioritise deliberate ways to cultivate inclusivity among team members, establishing a commitment to inclusion, so that all followers progress collectively towards shared objectives. Supporting literature indicates that leaders are responsible for creating inclusive environments by boosting cooperation through connection development and facilitating open and transparent interactions (Randel et al., 2018; Korkmaz et al., 2022). The deterioration of these methods may impede opportunities for inclusion and impact team cohesion (Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023).

Leaders indicated that deliberately promoting inclusion through transparency, trust cultivation, and relationship enhancement has built a sense of belonging and increased team cohesion. Therefore, these leaders have formulated strategies that include the coordination of the same in-office days for team members, the facilitation of regular informal interactions, and the establishment of open safe spaces for followers to articulate their concerns and thoughts. This is supported by literature, stating that occurrences of social isolation could hinder information exchange, creativity, and innovation (Gashi et al., 2021), highlighting the significance of personal interactions in fostering relationships and social connections (Charalampous et al., 2021). The research findings of this study corroborate current literature, indicating that the diverse strategies adopted by leaders resulted in favourable outcomes promoting inclusion.

6.1.4 Intentional Developing Psychological Safety

Rebuilding trust and psychological safety following leadership deficiencies

A novel finding indicated that leaders who encountered already present teams that had disintegrated due to preceding inadequate leadership had to find ways to foster trust and actively enhance psychological safety within those teams. Supporting literature suggests that imbalances in leadership and authority can negatively impact team members; a considerable power distance results in individuals being disengaged, hence diminishing

psychological safety (Opoku et al., 2019). The absence of trust and psychological safety hindered collaboration and team performance, resulting in disconnection among team members. The leaders stated that establishing trust required significant effort, highlighting that continuous engagement, vulnerability, and mutual understanding among individuals are essential for fostering team dynamics that enhance psychological safety. Supporting literature stated that the complicated nature of establishing and sustaining relationships within hybrid teams, emphasises the necessity for a robust culture of trust (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). Moreover, the literature suggests that although psychological safety includes more than just trust, trust remains an essential component in cultivating psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Alami et al., 2023).

Consequently, the current leaders were able to evaluate team dynamics upon their arrival and implement corrective measures to strengthen the teams. Furthermore, the literature supports that leaders model appropriate behaviour within teams and influence the work environment (Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017; Remtulla et al., 2021; Edmondson & Bransby, 2023), therefore these leaders had to develop strategies to increase team cohesion. The research findings of this study corroborate existing literature by emphasising the significance of trust and psychological safety among teams. The research further extends the literature by identifying potential areas for future research into interventions aimed at improving psychological safety in teams that have been disempowered and negatively impacted by previous leadership.

The findings of Research Question 1 delved into how leadership behaviours have adapted to foster an inclusive environment in hybrid teams. This study supports the literature and concludes that leaders have become more outcome-oriented by adopting flexibility and autonomy (Charalampous et al., 2021; Bell et al., 2022; Peprah, 2023; Teng-Calleja et al., 2023). Furthermore, leaders have adopted an empowerment approach, promoting and facilitating autonomy to prioritise collaboration and engagement to enhance performance. The current literature corroborates these findings; yet the researcher argues the constraints of empowering leadership, advocating for further research in the hybrid environment (Randel et al., 2018; Charalampous et al., 2021; Bell et al., 2022; Peprah, 2023; Teng-Calleja et al., 2023).

The dependence on technological communication tools has become crucial for leaders in ensuring accessibility and facilitating rapid decision-making. Despite the contrasting findings, it was revealed that most of the participants had developed a seamless

dependence on technological communication tools for effective communication as stated in the literature (Cheng et al., 2015; Gashi et al., 2021; Charalampous et al., 2021). Additionally, the findings suggested that leaders are increasingly deliberate in fostering relationships, trust, and psychological safety to cultivate inclusive environments. Literature underscores the significance of leaders exhibiting open and transparent engagements to enhance professional and social connections, hence improving team cohesion (Randel et al., 2018; Charalampous et al., 2021; Korkmaz et al., 2022).

The findings of this study further highlighted the essential importance of trust in fostering psychological safety. The intensity and commitment required by leaders to regain that trust. Literature supports this perspective and underscores the importance of leadership in fostering trust within teams to enhance team dynamics (Edmondson, 1999; Opoku et al., 2019; Chamakiotis et al., 2021). The findings emphasise the importance of further research on the role of leaders in restoring trust following prior ineffective leadership. The findings of the research questions emphasise that by adopting a relational strategy that fosters trust and open communication, leaders can be able to establish inclusive environments for followers in hybrid teams (Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023).

6.2 Research Question 2

RQ2: How does inclusive leadership influence psychological safety in hybrid teams?

Research Question 2 aimed at exploring the influence of inclusive leadership on psychological safety within hybrid teams. The emergence of hybrid teams has introduced unique challenges, including a possible risk of isolating employees and eroding workplace inclusion. Participants provided insights and strategies adopted by leaders to promote inclusivity. Participants subsequently explored how leaders demonstrated psychological safety in hybrid teams. Two key themes that emerged from the data analysis were cultivating inclusion and creating a safe space.

6.2.1 Theme 2: Cultivating Inclusion

6.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Fostering a Sense of Belonging

Building Relationships and Enhancing Equity

Participants underscored the necessity for leaders to prioritise transparent involvement and accessibility, ensuring clear communication of expectations to strengthen relationships and equity in teams. Leaders should establish an environment that promotes conversation and cultivates support for their followers. Leaders should also develop strategies that foster open communication and trust to enable the ongoing development of high-quality relationships and equity within their teams. The literature supports this perspective by emphasizing that relationship building is a key leadership behaviour that fosters a sense of belonging. This involves creating an environment free from negative feelings of exclusion (Roberson & Perry, 2022; Canlas & Williams, 2022).

Open Communication

Participants highlighted the intentionality of leaders in building relationships and fostering equity within teams. By facilitating regular check-ins, these leaders create opportunities for clear and transparent communication. Leaders cultivate open and transparent communication to foster mutual trust among leaders and followers in achieving team expectations. Supporting literature indicates that excellent communication enables leaders to cultivate a hybrid atmosphere that promotes trust which enhances performance (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Hincapie and Costa, 2024). Additionally, the literature emphasizes that interpersonal trust fosters psychological safety, allowing followers the flexibility to offer valuable ideas and perspectives (Khan, 1990; Edmondson, 2004; Alami et al., 2023).

Participants highlighted that the check-in sessions allowed for information sharing, collaboration, and support which enables followers to seek guidance and share their job tasks, therefore ensuring that information is streamlined and shared for team members to collaborate. Supporting literature states that when leaders demonstrate support for team members, fostering a comfortable atmosphere for sharing feedback and opinions is integral to the process of promoting belonging (Randel et al., 2018). Furthermore, team check-ins and one-on-one meetings cultivate a sense of community and collective identity, allowing individuals to express their needs openly (Randel et al., 2018; Korkmaz et al., 2022).

Moreover, the findings of this study state that understanding the individual needs and expectations of team members empowers leaders to provide the necessary support and create an environment where all team members are treated fairly. This view is supported by Skowon-Mielnik (2022), the author stated that leaders should strengthen trust with

followers to maintain equity and avoid possible bias in challenging hybrid teams. The research findings of this study support and contribute towards existing literature by demonstrating that this relationship-building approach is crucial for fostering a strong sense of belonging, especially in hybrid teams.

6.2.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Value for Uniqueness

Empowerment

Participants conveyed that leaders empower followers by fostering an environment in which followers exhibit confidence and independence in decision-making and problem-solving concerning their work obligations. These followers are entrusted by their leaders to use their unique perspectives to make appropriate judgements, and crucially, leaders support followers from a distance, when necessary. Literature highlights that leaders empower followers by fostering an environment that values their differences and encourages followers to contribute diverse perspectives as well as skills within teams (Randel et al., 2018; Roberson & Perry, 2022; Korkmaz et al., 2022).

When leaders adopt this approach, they cultivate individuality, which motivates followers to perform optimally (Korkmaz et al., 2022). It was revealed that leaders who empower their followers in hybrid teams cultivate favourable relationships that facilitate collaboration, resulting in improved team performance (Bell et al., 2022). The findings demonstrate that these leaders have trust in their followers to leverage their talents to make sound business decisions, and by giving them authority, they enhance the beliefs of followers in the value of their abilities and knowledge.

Career growth and development were identified as an additional aspect of empowerment in the findings of this study, wherein leaders have provided followers opportunities to acquire diverse skills and to contribute constructively to the job tasks of their peers. This has fostered a substantial learning opportunity and collaborative team culture; wherein varied contributions are embraced and enhance performance. Supporting literature highlights that empowerment is facilitated through learning and development opportunities offered by leaders, enabling individuals to improve on their strengths and address their weaknesses (Randel et al., 2018; Roberson & Perry, 2022; Korkmaz et al., 2022; Beijer et al., 2024).

Additionally, the findings underscored the importance of articulating expectations. In hybrid contexts, when leaders and subordinates rely on technological tools as the major means of communication, leaders need to articulate work deliverables and their

expectations for followers to report to them effectively. The hybrid work environment has eliminated non-verbal cues owing to the lack of direct physical interaction with subordinates. Leaders must communicate clearly to ensure that subordinates are held accountable for their performance to prevent underlying assumptions. Hincapie and Costa (2024) assert that hybrid working teams are susceptible to misunderstandings and disputes stemming from co-location dynamics, and inclusive leaders must foster an environment that acknowledges communication disparities.

The research findings state that inclusive leaders facilitate transparent and consistent communication with their followers, by explicitly outlining the roles, responsibilities, and performance expectations for each team member. This guarantees a clear feeling of accountability, and leaders must actively oversee individual and team performance (Bell et al., 2020; Hincapie and Costa, 2024). The overall research findings of this study align with existing literature, by reinforcing the significance of leaders articulating expectations clearly. Lastly, the overall findings of this study support the narrative outlined in the literature regarding how empowerment creates value for uniqueness and fosters inclusion.

Recognition of efforts and contributions

The researcher received responses from participants to understand how leaders acknowledge the work and contributions of individuals inside teams. Followers indicated that leaders use the existing organisational structures to acknowledge their accomplishments. Literature underscores that leaders should acknowledge followers and validate their contributions, typically at an individual or team level (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Beijer et al., 2024). In addition to this method, the findings state that leaders emphasise personal interactions, such as immediate expressions of gratitude via email or WhatsApp to keep the momentum of satisfactory performance going. Participants added that this boosts team morale, encourages the necessity for feedback and motivates followers to excel further.

The integration of this inclusive leadership behaviour is recent, as it is not included in the frameworks established by Shore (2011) and Randel et al. (2018). The research findings of this study revealed that acknowledging the contributions of followers fosters a sense of inclusion beyond just motivational objectives. Therefore, these findings corroborate existing literature and additionally extend it, as this behaviour remains under-explored.

6.2.2 Psychological Safety: Creating a Safe Space

6.2.2.1 Creating a Climate for Psychological Safety

Most of the participants indicated that followers working in a psychologically safe work environment, where they are free to speak up, and leaders are responsive to their needs and expectations has a significant positive impact. Furthermore, leaders have fostered a culture that encourages engagement and feedback among team members and leaders. The majority of participants indicated that they are satisfied with their jobs as they feel accepted, allowing them to authentically express themselves while fulfilling performance expectations. Supporting literature states that psychological safety promotes development by facilitating a constructive view of work challenges, which are consequently regarded as chances for innovation and creativity (Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023).

The findings of this study stated that followers feel adequately secure to admit their errors, trusting that they will not encounter judgment, therefore creating a new opportunity for teams to learn from their mistakes. Literature supports this view and indicates that psychological safety in the workplace cultivates trusting connections, especially with leaders, who are pivotal in exemplifying support and fulfilling the expectations of individuals and teams (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023).

Additionally, leaders emphasized the importance of addressing issues with followers through positive constructive engagements and stated that as trust and interpersonal relationships strengthen, psychological safety increases in teams. These findings are supported by Nakamur and Milner (2023), the authors reported that it is essential to interact with followers compassionately and empathetically, as this can enhance interpersonal relationships. It is additionally asserted that by fostering constructive collaborative inclusivity through active involvement, leaders can establish common relationships with followers, even in a hybrid environment (Nakamur & Milner, 2023).

Leadership behaviours have been identified as antecedents to psychological safety, as team members perceive support from their superiors, and the honest exchange of feedback enhances psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023). Additionally, Hincapie and Costa (2024) assert that inclusive leaders can cultivate psychological safety by implementing strategies such as regular team interactions, active engagement, and promoting follower voice behaviours. This underscores the critical role of leadership in enhancing psychological safety and overall team performance.

The research findings of this study support existing literature that states that leaders are crucial in exhibiting deliberate behaviours and strategies that create a climate for psychological safety.

6.3 Research Question 2 Conclusion

The findings in the study were consistent with literature indicating that inclusive leadership behaviours such as relationship building, equity, empowerment and recognition, rely on transparency for their effectiveness (Randel et al., 2018; Korkmaz et al., 2022; Roberson & Perry, 2022; Hincapie and Costa, 2024). Additionally, the findings of the study were consistent with the literature on recognition behaviour and further contributed to the gap in the existing literature due to its recency (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Beijer et al., 2024).

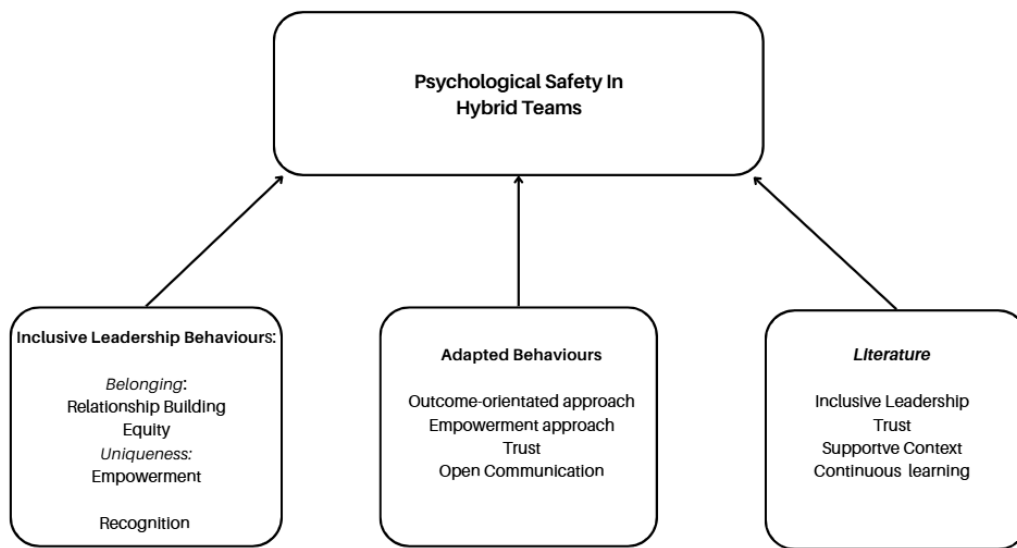
Additionally, the research findings underscored that psychological safety is carried out through feedback and involvement by leaders, and followers when they are satisfied with their job experience job satisfaction (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023; Nakamur & Milner, 2023). The findings suggested that as inclusive leaders provide open communication and foster trust, psychological safety is enhanced, which positively influences team dynamics and performance.

6.4 Integrated Discussion of Results

The objective of this research is to understand how inclusive leadership behaviours have adapted to influence psychological safety in hybrid teams. The research findings achieved the objectives of the questions described in Chapter 3. In light of the increasing prevalence of hybrid work, multiple challenges have been recognised, and the research aimed to understand how leadership behaviours adapt to foster inclusivity in this new context. This research highlighted the necessity for leaders to adopt a more relational and empowering approach to foster open communication, involvement, and collaboration (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Beijer et al., 2024; Bell et al., 2022). The findings of the study also indicated that flexible and agile leaders can seamlessly adapt to diverse environments. The findings further revealed that to alleviate delayed and inefficient communication and decision-making, leaders should enhance the utilisation of technological communication tools (Charalampous et al., 2021; Bell., 2022). This research underscored the significance of trust and open communication in fostering and enhancing relationships.

The findings of this study identified trust and transparent communication as fundamental elements in cultivating inclusive hybrid teams and establishing psychological safety for team members (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023). The results also indicate that for leaders to cultivate relational dynamics, they must intentionally cultivate transparency with their team members and establish clear expectations (Nakamura & Milner, 2023). Furthermore, it is recommended that leaders implement suitable strategies to cultivate and sustain trust within teams; as this research emphasises the critical importance of trust in hybrid teams. Open-minded leaders empower followers and foster ongoing engagement and collaboration, thereby establishing a safe space for open communication and trust (Hincapié and Costa, 2024). The theoretical model shown below exemplifies the key themes uncovered in the research, according to the two research questions.

Figure 7: Theoretical Model



(Source: Researcher's theoretical model compilation, 2024)

6.5 Conclusion

The research findings were analysed and comprehensively discussed by existing literature. Three key themes were highlighted which are; adaptive leadership behaviours, cultivating inclusion and creating a safe space. The research revealed that both leaders and followers significantly contribute to addressing hybrid work difficulties via deliberate leadership methods. The four inclusive leadership behaviours outlined in Chapter 2 were considered relevant (Korkmaz., 2022; Beijer et al., 2024). Nonetheless, additional leadership behaviours were also found to be as equally important in hybrid teams. The findings of this identified trust and open communication at the core of fostering psychological safety in hybrid teams (Hincapie and Costa, 2024). This study emphasises the significance of the level of trust and effective open communication required by leaders to cultivate psychologically safe inclusive environments.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The objective of this study was to understand how inclusive leadership behaviours have adapted to influence psychological safety in hybrid teams. This chapter intends to summarise the principal research findings. It further aims to offer theoretical and practical contributions. Additionally, practical implications and recommendations derived from the findings will also be provided. Lastly, the research limitations and recommendations for future research will be made.

7.1 Summary of Principal Conclusions

7.1.1 Research Question 1

How do leaders adapt their behaviours to foster an inclusive environment In hybrid teams?

This research revealed that hybrid work has diverse challenges and benefits necessitating leaders to intentionally adapt their leadership style, to be more outcome-oriented and empowering. Leaders have prioritised high-quality relational working relationships founded on trust and open communication, prioritising both formal and informal connections to ensure that critical elements such as decision-making do not adversely affect team dynamics, shared objectives, and performance (Charalampous et al., 2021; Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2022).

The findings indicate that when leaders deliberately enforce inclusion, participants recognise that it fosters an inclusive environment where followers can express themselves freely and experience a sense of belonging and appreciation for their uniqueness (Randel et al., 2018; Korkmaz et al., 2022). This aligns with existing literature and validates the significance of inclusive leadership, characterised by leaders who are open, approachable, and accessible to their followers in hybrid teams (Roberson & Perry, 2022; Beijer et al., 2024).

The research findings indicate the detrimental effect of prior leaders' shortcomings on psychological safety. This encompassed the enduring effects on individuals and team dynamics, as well as the substantial dedication and effort needed by future leaders to restore high psychological safety through trust, transparency, and comprehension of their followers (Opoku et al., 2019). This research asserts that the deterioration of

psychological safety significantly affects team dynamics and impedes performance, highlighting the critical role of inclusive leadership in cultivating psychological safety within hybrid teams.

7.1.2 Research Question 2

How does inclusive leadership influence psychological safety in hybrid teams?

The findings indicated that inclusive leadership behaviours aligned with existing literature. The findings regarding relationship building and equity aligned with existing literature on how leaders can uphold equity within teams through active and consistent engagement. Additionally, the research findings indicate that inclusive leadership behaviours empower followers by prioritising their growth and development (Randel et al., 2018; Roberson & Perry, 2022; Korkmaz et al., 2022; Beijer et al., 2024). Ultimately, the findings indicate that the acknowledgement of efforts and contributions aligns with existing literature; nevertheless, due to its recent emergence as an inclusive leadership behaviour (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Beijer et al., 2024), this study extends the literature.

The research findings indicate that participants typically perceive psychological safety in their hybrid work contexts, characterised by involvement, feedback, and job satisfaction among followers (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Brandsby, 2023). While inclusive leadership behaviours are identified as antecedents to psychological safety, this research found that, over and above the four inclusive leadership behaviours stated in Chapter 2. Additional behaviours such as an outcome-orientated approach, trust and open communication are essential for leaders to adapt to fulfil the needs and expectations of followers in hybrid team environments.

The research findings underscored the necessity of leaders clearly articulating job objectives and deliverables to promote accountability among followers and to cultivate a trust-based working environment (Hincapie and Costa, 2024). Literature indicates that trust and open communication are more critical in hybrid teams than in conventional in-office settings, and the degree of trust actively fostered by leaders significantly impacts psychological safety (Chamakiotis et al., 2021).

7.2 Contributions of the Research

7.2.1 Theoretical

This research sought to enhance the literature on the adaptability of leadership behaviours in hybrid teams. Furthermore, this research sought to explore the leadership behaviours necessary to cultivate psychological safety in hybrid teams. This research emphasises the significance of inclusive leaders and highlights the essential role they play in fostering and sustaining social interactions through consistent and transparent communication, a factor mentioned in the literature as being inadequate (Chamakiotis et al., 2021).

The research findings affirmed the importance of leaders acknowledging the efforts and contributions of followers (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Beijer et al., 2024); nonetheless, they emphasise that both formal and informal communication channels promote recognition and bolster confidence. Over and above the four existing inclusive leadership behaviours, the research findings indicate that open communication and trust development are essential for cultivating inclusive and psychologically secure settings in hybrid teams. The findings emphasise that these two qualities contribute to individual well-being and enhance both individual and team performance. The aforementioned theoretical contributions enhance the literature on inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and hybrid work settings. The role of trust and communication are to be further explored on how they influence psychological safety in the workplace.

7.2.2 Practical Contribution

The research findings indicated that inclusive leadership is positively correlated with psychological safety. This research indicates that followers uphold a sense of belonging while valuing originality (Randel et al. 2018; Beijer et al. 2024); nonetheless, the findings suggest the necessity for the adoption of inclusive leadership practices, particularly in relationship building and equity. The studies also indicated effective ways for sustaining relationships, equity, empowerment, and recognition within hybrid teams. Leaders must exhibit greater intentionality, inclusivity, and care to address the dynamics of hybrid teams.

This study explored psychological safety in hybrid teams and discovered open communication, and trust as pivotal in fostering psychological safety in hybrid teams. The study

and literature presented practical strategies on how inclusive leaders cultivate psychological safety (Hincapie & Costa, 2024). Ultimately, by employing these practical strategies, practitioners can assess and track progress regarding performance. These strategies will be elaborated upon in the subsequent section. Although this study supported the importance of inclusive leaders, it additionally underscores the crucial role leaders play in building and maintaining social relationships through continuous and clear communication, which literature has noted to be limited (Chamakiotis et al., 2021).

The findings of this research supported the significance of leaders recognising the efforts and contributions of followers (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Beijer et al., 2024), however, the findings underscore that formal and non-formal communication channels, enhance recognition and boost confidence. The research findings suggest that open communication and the development of trust are crucial in fostering inclusive psychologically safe environments in hybrid teams. The practical contributions are beneficial to organisations on how practical strategies can create inclusion and influence psychological safety in hybrid teams to increase performance and maintain employee well-being.

7.3 Implications for Management

The findings of this research presented suggestions on practical strategies for management and other relevant stakeholders can implement adapting inclusive leadership behaviours and competencies to foster psychological safety in hybrid teams. Organisations should conduct periodic leadership seminars and programmes as a way of equipping leaders with the necessary knowledge and skills to adapt to this unpredictable business environment.

Maintaining relationships and equity

Leaders can develop clear communication strategies to maintain relationships within teams. Fostering communication channels, that ensure prompt and quick turnaround time, will ensure that organisational targets and goals are not delayed due to the hybrid team environment. Additionally, leaders are responsible for developing team cultures based on trust to ensure that transparency, social connections and collaboration remain a priority in hybrid teams. Additionally, the researcher suggests that leaders and followers establish a psychological contract, wherein leaders trust that followers exercise their judgement to make decisions to maintain independence and ownership of their roles and fulfil deliverables in hybrid teams.

Recognition of efforts

This study has proven how recognition fosters a sense of inclusion. Therefore, leaders are advised to intentionally promote recognition beyond organisational structure and develop strategies where immediate recognition and appreciation through appropriate communication channels for follower efforts leads to confidence and positive connections.

7.4 Research Limitations

- i. Although the researcher gained valuable insight from every interview conducted, the researcher is aware of general bias (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), like semi-structured interviews, the interviewer had to be careful not to ask interviewees leading questions, however, this was identified as a limitation.
- ii. The sample size consisted of 14 participants, with 7 leaders and 7 followers and the research states that a bigger sample size with more followers would have been more valuable, with less possibility of bias towards leaders.
- iii. Qualitative research is a subjective study approach (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), and the researcher recognizes this as a limitation.
- iv. The researcher had limited knowledge of how to conduct a thematic analysis on ATLAS.ti. Therefore, the researcher states that the approach followed to develop the codes, sub-themes and themes is a limitation.
- v. The outcomes of the study did not reveal evidence of the long-term sustainability of the hybrid working system and whether inclusive leadership will sustain long-term performance or not, therefore the researcher recognizes this as a limitation.
- vi. The findings of the study did not explore cultural diversity, and the possibility of cultural differences particularly in South Africa may influence inclusive leadership and psychological safety in teams.

7.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The hybrid work model has recently become relevant in literature due to its sudden emergence. Scholars are currently exploring existing leadership behaviours and related outcomes due to the numerous challenges and benefits identified in hybrid teams (Simmons & Yawson, 2022; Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Gashi et al., 2021; Hincapie & Costa, 2024). Therefore, future research can explore the following:

- i. The reliance on electronic communication tools has altered communication channels; therefore, it is worth exploring how followers express feedback and errors to leaders influencing psychological safety in hybrid teams.
- ii. The findings in this study revealed the significance of how leadership deficiencies demonstrated by predecessors impact team dynamics, trust and overall psychological safety. Therefore, further research should be conducted on how leaders can increase trust and foster team psychological safety after leadership deficiencies demonstrated by predecessors.
- iii. The findings of this study identified the crucial role trust and communication play in hybrid teams. Therefore, further research should be conducted to compare current hybrid team dynamics versus traditional in-office team dynamics in a post-pandemic view on the significance of trust and communication on employee engagement.
- iv. The findings of this study argued the definition of the empowered leadership style with literature (Randel et al., 2018) and stated that empowerment fosters inclusion. This researcher recommends that the leadership style should be studied further particularly as organisational cultures and values have adapted in a post-pandemic context. Working teams, the definition of empowering leadership style warrants more exploration, as the definition contradicts the empowerment aspect inherent in inclusive leadership behaviours.

7.8 Conclusion

This study aimed to understand how inclusive leadership behaviour adapts to foster psychological safety in hybrid teams within the financial sector in South Africa. The inclusive leadership behaviours in literature, relationship building, equity, empowerment and recognition demonstrated inclusion (Korkmaz et al., 2022). Additionally, the outcomes of this research indicated the crucial role outcome-orientated approach, trust and open communication play in fostering inclusion within hybrid teams and facilitating psychological safety. The findings of this study affirm that trust and open communication are antecedents of psychological safety, and additionally, the importance of leaders having an outcome-orientated approach to effectively adapt in hybrid teams.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction (5 mins)
Welcome and introduction of interviewer and interviewee
Confidentiality (5 mins)
Confirm confidentiality and anonymity
Assure the interviewee that participation is voluntary and withdrawal at any stage of the interview is acceptable
Demographics and Background (5mins)
Ask about the work experience of the interviewee and the years worked at the organisation
Confirm qualification level and the job level in the organisation
Ask the number of team members and reporting lines

ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research objective	Associated research question	Interview questions	
		Leaders and Followers	
Explore employee experience of hybrid work	General Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Describe your experience of working in a hybrid environment, including any challenges you may have experienced. What leadership changes have occurred since you started working in a hybrid environment? 	
		Leaders	Followers
Explore perceptions of inclusive leadership behaviours in a hybrid work environment	<p>How do leaders adapt their behaviours to foster an inclusive environment in hybrid work?</p> <p>Beijer et al., 2024</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> In your interactions with your team, do you maintain equity and mutual boundaries? If so, how do you do it? Do you encourage idea sharing your team? If so, how do you do it? Do you involve your team in the decision-making process. If so, how do you do it? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Does your leader maintain equity and mutual boundaries within your team? Kindly elaborate and provide an example? Does your leader encourage idea sharing within your team? Kindly elaborate Does your leader involve you in the decision-making process within your team? Kindly elaborate and provide an example
		Leaders	Followers
Explore what psychological safety looks like in hybrid working environment.	<p>How does inclusive leadership influence psychological safety in hybrid teams?</p> <p>Remtulla et al., 2021; Shafaei & Nejati, 2023</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What is your understanding of psychological safety? What is your experience of Psychological in a hybrid work environment? Do you provide a psychologically safe environment for your subordinates? Please elaborate 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What is your understanding of psychological safety? What is your experience of Psychological in a hybrid work environment? Does your leader contribute towards creating a psychological safe environment? Please elaborate
		Leaders & Followers	
Explore influence of inclusive leadership in psychological safety in hybrid work environment.	<p>How does inclusive leadership influence psychological safety in hybrid teams?</p> <p>Remtulla et al., 2021; Shafaei & Nejati, 2023, Beijer et al., 2024</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What kind of leadership behaviours and competencies are required in creating psychological safety? Do you think inclusive leadership plays a role in fostering a psychologically safety environment? 	

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research on inclusive leadership and the purpose of this research is that I am trying to find out more about the leadership style and if it influences psychological safety in hybrid teams.

Our interview is expected to last about an hour and will help us understand inclusive leadership behaviours and psychological safety in non-traditional hybrid work environments.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be reported without identifiers and the researcher confirms confidentiality for the participant. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: Tumelo Bokgwathile
Email: 29329877@gibs.co.za

Research Supervisor Name: Dorothy Ndletyana
Email: NdletyanaD@gibs.co.za

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D: CODING LIST

Code	Frequency
Acceptance of differences	31
Accessibility	9
Accountability	7
Achievements	2
Acknowledgement	3
Adaptability	9
Agile Environment	2
Attentive	2
Authenticity	5
Authoritative Leadership	4
Autonomy	7
Availability	3
Belonging	7
Bias Relationships	1
Blurred Boundaries	2
burnout	2
Capabilities	10
Caring	9
Change Management	12
Check-ins	13
Clear Expectations	12
Collaboration	35
Confidence	2
Confident Leaders	2
Conflict Resolution	2
Connection Management	14
Constructive Feedback	19
Contextual Leadership	5
Corrective Behaviour	7
Critical Thinking	1
Cultural Diversity	12
Deadline Driven Environment	2
Decision-making	10
Delayed Decision-making	3
Developing Weaknesses	4
Discipline	2
Disconnection	3
Distraction	5
Distrusting	6
Diverse Perspectives	13
Diverse Skills	7
Efficiency	1
Electronic Communication Tools	20
Emotional Intelligence	3
Empathy	23
Employee Retention Management	1
Empowerment	9

Encouragement	9
Engagement	59
Equality	18
Error Management	10
Exclusivity	2
Fairness	3
Fear of job loss	1
Flexibility	17
Freedom of Expression	10
Fulltime In-office Working	5
Growth and Development	15
Honesty	6
Humility	1
Hybrid Work Management	26
Ideation	2
In-office Preference	1
Inclusion	16
Incompetence	4
Independence	16
Influence	1
Information Sharing	10
Innovation	1
Intentionality	12
Interlinked Work	9
Involved	4
Job Satisfaction	1
Lack of Empathy	1
Lack of Non-Verbal Cues	1
Leader Development	5
Leader-led Mindset	4
Leveraging Strengths	5
Loyalty	1
Managing Boundaries	2
Managing Expectations	7
Mentorship	6
Micromanagement	1
Motivation	3
Non-hierarchical Structure	6
No Acceptance of differences	1
Openness	16
Organisational Culture Shift	14
Organisational Values Shift	11
Participation	5
Performance Driven	9
Performance Management	42
Poor Leadership	1
Prior Mismanagement	9
Problem Solving	4
Productivity	9

Raise Concerns	1
Relationship Management	32
Respect	5
Reward	4
Risk-taking	3
Role Ownership	11
Room to improve Recognition	1
Safe Space	45
Setting Example	2
Shared Leadership	1
Social Engagement	13
Solution Driven	2
Stakeholder Management	1
Strategic Planning	3
Strong Team Cohesion	10
Structural and Informal Recognition	21
Support	48
Task Management	6
Team Disconnect	2
Team Dynamics	17
Too Much of a Good Thing	3
Transactional Leadership	5
Transformational Leader	1
Transparency	4
Trauma response	1
Trust	39
Understanding	36
Unsafe Environment	12
Unsupportive	3
Upskilling	4
Value	10
Virtual Work	3
Vulnerability	5
Warrior Mindset	3
Well-being	4
Work Pressure	3
Work-life Balance	11
Working After Hours	2