UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

LEADING BEYOND BOUNDARIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION IN CONTEMPORARY WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Dissertation to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a Master's Degree in Communication Studies with a Specialization in Strategic Communication and Leadership

By

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Faculty of Human Sciences

September 2024

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DISSERTATION

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Under the supervision of Prof. Joao Simão

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Abstract

The shift towards hybrid, remote, and on-site work models, driven by technological advances and the COVID-19 pandemic, has reshaped leadership communication strategies in the workplace. This study investigates the impact of these evolving work models on leadership communication within the German luxury and chemical industries, addressing a critical gap in understanding how leaders adapt to maintain effectiveness in such diverse environments. This research focuses on exploring how perceived leadership communication varies across hybrid, remote, and on-site work models, with a particular emphasis on employee perspectives. Therefore, this study investigates the following research question: *How do hybrid, remote, and on-site work models influence perceived leadership communication within the luxury industry in comparison to the chemical industry in Germany?*

Using a three-step mixed-methods approach, this study begins with a quantitative survey to evaluate perceptions of leadership communication effectiveness across work models. The second step involves qualitative interviews with employees to identify key factors, challenges, and future focal points shaping these perceptions. Finally, qualitative interviews with leaders aim to offer a comprehensive understanding from both perspectives, providing deeper insights into the overall communication dynamics.

Key findings indicate that the hybrid work model fosters the most effective leadership communication by balancing flexibility with personal interaction. Remote work has improved due to technological advancements, while on-site work is seen less favorably due to limited flexibility and reliance on virtual tools. Technological adaptability, clarity, and transparency emerge as critical in all work models. Leaders value technological progress and individualized consideration. Differences between the industries show that the luxury industry emphasizes personal interaction, while the chemical industry prioritizes efficiency.

The study contributes valuable insights into the evolving role of leadership communication in modern work settings, offering practical recommendations for leaders aiming to enhance communication effectiveness in increasingly flexible and virtual workplace landscapes.

Keywords: leadership communication; hybrid work; remote work; perceived leadership; virtual leadership; employee perceptions; transformational leadership

Resumo

A transição para modelos de trabalho híbridos, remotos e presenciais, impulsionada pelos avanços tecnológicos e pela pandemia da COVID-19, reformulou as estratégias de comunicação da liderança. Este estudo investiga o impacto desses modelos na comunicação de liderança nas indústrias químicas e de luxo alemãs, abordando como os líderes se adaptam para manter a eficácia em ambientes diversos. A investigação foca-se em como a perceção da comunicação de liderança varia entre os modelos híbrido, remoto e presencial, com ênfase nas perspetivas dos trabalhadores. Assim, a questão de investigação é: Como os modelos de trabalho híbrido, remoto e presencial influenciam a percepção da comunicação de liderança na indústria de luxo em comparação com a indústria química na Alemanha?

Utilizando uma abordagem de métodos mistos em três etapas, este estudo começa com um inquérito quantitativo para avaliar as percepções da comunicação de liderança em diferentes modelos de trabalho. A segunda etapa envolve entrevistas qualitativas com funcionários para explorar os principais fatores e desafios que moldam essas percepções, seguida de entrevistas com líderes para proporcionar uma visão abrangente e aprofundada da dinâmica da comunicação.

As principais conclusões indicam que o modelo híbrido promove a comunicação de liderança mais eficaz, equilibrando flexibilidade e interação pessoal. O trabalho remoto melhorou com avanços tecnológicos, enquanto o trabalho presencial é visto menos favoravelmente devido à flexibilidade limitada e à dependência de ferramentas virtuais. A adaptabilidade tecnológica, clareza e transparência são essenciais em todos os modelos de trabalho. Líderes valorizam o progresso tecnológico e a atenção individualizada. Diferenças entre as indústrias mostram que o setor de luxo valoriza mais a interação pessoal, enquanto o setor químico prioriza a eficiência.

O estudo oferece valiosas contribuições sobre o papel da comunicação de liderança nos ambientes de trabalho modernos, propondo recomendações práticas para líderes que buscam melhorar a eficácia da comunicação em cenários de trabalho cada vez mais flexíveis e virtuais.

Palavras-chave: comunicação da liderança; trabalho híbrido; trabalho remoto; liderança percebida; liderança virtual; percepções dos empregados; liderança transformacional

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
approx.	Approximately
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
e.g.	For example
HR	Human Resources
MS Teams	Microsoft Teams
PLC	Perceived Leadership Communication

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Introduction

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial impact on work environments, compelling organizations worldwide to rapidly adopt new work models, such as remote and hybrid settings (Newman et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021). What initially started as a crisis-driven response has now evolved into a permanent transformation in how work is structured. According to the latest Gallup survey (2023), fewer than 10% of employees in remote-capable roles prefer working solely on-site. Meanwhile, one-third of the respondents expressed a desire to work fully remote, while the majority favor a hybrid model which combines the flexibility of remote work with the structure of being on-site. Nevertheless, a recent Gensler study, published by the LA Times in early 2024, indicates a growing tendency among employees to return to the office, driven by feelings of increased productivity and social inclusion (Gensler Research Institute, 2024).

As these developments towards different work models being applied simultaneously make work increasingly dynamic, organizations rely on effective communication, especially between leaders and their employees (Myers, 2015; Sias & Shin, 2019). Leading teams with both face-to-face and virtual components places new communicative challenges on leaders. They are responsible for ensuring that employee expectations are met, that adequate supervision is provided, and that communication remains effective (Caputo et al., 2024). Although research and prominent leadership theories, such as transformational leadership, have long emphasized the role of communication in inspiring and motivating teams (Bass, 1985), the rise of hybrid and remote work has introduced new facets that challenge these traditional models. While leadership communication in face-to-face settings has been thoroughly studied (Atwater & Waldman, 2008; Hatter & Bass, 1988), and virtual leadership gained attention in recent years (e.g., Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Loyless, 2023), there is a noticeable lack of literature addressing the specific demands of different work models. In particular, there is limited exploration of how leadership communication can be effectively performed in teams that operate across a combination of on-site, remote and hybrid environments, identifying the specific communicative demands of each work model.

However, leadership is a subject that is in the eye of the beholder, and leader-intended leadership does not necessarily align with employee-perceived leadership (Jacobsen & Bøgh

Andersen, 2015). The relevance is confirmed by numerous studies that address perceived leadership communication, but the actual consideration of perceived leadership communication between different working models has rarely been explored (Amabile et al., 2004; Jacobsen & Bøgh Andersen, 2015; Mikkelson et al., 2021). Therefore, due to changes in work models and the differences between what employees expect and how leaders act, the role of leadership has become more complex. This makes it important for organizations to equip leaders with the skills needed for effective communication in on-site, remote, and hybrid work environments. Additionally, understanding employee perceptions is crucial to gain a full view of leadership effectiveness and to ensure alignment between leadership intentions and employee expectations.

Due to the scope of this thesis, the focus will be placed on a comparison across the luxury and chemical industry in Germany. This approach was chosen because, in existing literature, the industry has often played a limited role in examining leadership communication, and there are few insights on how industry-specific factors influence communication strategies. Given that different industries present unique communicative challenges and conditions, this thesis aims to explore these variations in greater detail. By doing so, it seeks to shed light on an overlooked aspect of leadership communication that could offer valuable contributions to the field. The respective industries were selected due to their contrasting organizational structures and operational demands. By analyzing leadership communication in these two sectors, this research seeks to determine whether industry-specific factors play a role in shaping leadership communication effectiveness, particularly in response to the shift toward hybrid work models. This thesis aims to provide insights into employee and leader perceptions of effective leadership communication across different work models. The goal is to identify key focus areas, challenges, and future priorities, and to offer practical recommendations for leadership communication in on-site, remote, and hybrid work models. This thesis is therefore guided by the following research question:

> **RQ:** *How do hybrid, remote, and on-site work models influence perceived leadership communication within the luxury industry in comparison to the chemical industry in Germany?*

In order to answer this research question, this thesis utilizes a three-step mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research. In the first step, a quantitative online survey was conducted to establish whether there are noticeable differences in how leadership communication is perceived across the three work models on-site, remote, and hybrid. This initial step aimed to identify patterns and distinctions, serving as the basis for further exploration. The second step involved qualitative interviews with employees to delve deeper into these perceptions. This was done to uncover which key factors, challenges, and future focal points define these views. Finally, the third step included qualitative interviews with leaders from the luxury and chemical industries. This step was important for capturing the leader's perspective alongside the employee insights in order to create a comprehensive overall picture.

This thesis is divided into two main parts. The first part, *Theoretical Framework*, reviews existing research on leadership communication in hybrid, remote, and on-site work models. This section lays the foundation for understanding the current academic discourse and identifies gaps in knowledge that this study aims to address. The second part, *Empirical Study*, outlines the research design and methodology in detail, including the rationale for selecting the luxury and chemical industries, the data collection methods, and the analytical approach. The results of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented, followed by a discussion of the key findings. The thesis concludes with practical implications for leadership communication, recommendations for future research, and a discussion of the study's limitations.

Part I – Theoretical Framework

Chapter 1 – Theoretical Foundations of Contemporary Work Models

In order to understand the role of work models in the context of perceived leadership communication, a foundation of the framework conditions of on-site, remote and hybrid work models is fundamental. Therefore, the following chapter provides a comprehensive theoretical framework. First, a brief overview of the fields of research is presented and a general definition of the work model is provided. Second, a more detailed explanation of the characteristics of the work model is conveyed. Thereafter, advantages and disadvantages of the respective work model is discussed, followed by an outline of current developments and future trends.

1.1 Traditional Office Work - An Overview

For a significant period of time, traditional office work was considered the most prevailing and widely adopted way of working (Wu et al., 2023). Despite the changes and transitions brought about by the pandemic to alternative work arrangements, the practice of office work remains, driven both by organizational mandates and the continued preference of employees for in-person office attendance. The most recent Office Space Report and Global Workplace Report indicate that 88% of companies mandate employees to work from the office a certain number of days a week. However, employees predominantly perceive the workplace as a space for social connections, personal development, and fostering the organizational culture, highlighting its continued relevance in the modern work landscape (Office Space Report, 2023; State of the Global Workplace Report, 2023). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that recent research trends display a notable shift away from the traditional concept of office work, with a growing interest in alternative work models, that are going to be further examined in the following chapters.

Looking at the literature to date, the subject of office work in an organizational context is a multifaceted and multi-disciplinary area of study which can be found in various research fields. Researchers have explored this topic from different angles, making contributions in fields such as ergonomics (Robertson et al., 2009; Sui et al., 2019), technology (Giuliano, 1982; Suchman, 1983), management (Iis et al., 2022; Taylor, 2004) or social studies (Babapour Chafi et al., 2021; Riach & Warren, 2015). The research field of ergonomics is

focusing more on occupational health and physical effects associated with office work, such as health-oriented work arrangements. Technological research looks at the technological foundations that are necessary in the office work environment and their ongoing development over time, which includes a focus on modern work models such as hybrid and remote work, as well as the need for employees to adapt to those changes. Management research primarily examines management strategies in office work environments and their performances, closely connected to post-pandemic office work. The research field of social studies concentrates more on the social aspect of office work such as the work environment it creates (Babapour Chafi et al., 2021; Mann & Williams, 1962), individual effects (Morse & Gergen, 1970; Samani, 2015), and networking (Becker et al., 1983; Thurman, 1979). This research field is closely connected to organizational studies, where significant contributions to office work research were made. Renowned authors like Barnard, Follett, Porter and Hackman, among others, published fundamental literature on topics like organizational functions, the dynamics of human relations in organizations, work design and structure and organizational competition (Barnard, 1968; Follett, 1919; R. Hackman, 1992; Porter, 1981). In line with this focus, this chapter will explore the role of work models from a social and organizational studies perspective, emphasizing how different work models, such as hybrid and remote work, influence the social and organizational structures within companies.

Due to the multifaceted nature of the research field outlined above, multiple definitions of office work out of different perspectives have been put forward. Denyer (1969) defines an office out of an early and very general understanding as a place where clerical operations are conducted. Panko (1984) distinguishes two types of offices, the procedural, and the non-procedural offices. The main functions of procedural offices involve carrying out sets of explicit steps towards a specified end, for example accounting offices, insurance administration offices and income tax offices (Panko, 1984). Non-procedural offices focus on achieving more general missions or goals, without having pre-specified explicit steps, for example top management offices or professional offices (Panko, 1984). Hirschheim (1985) considers an office within the context of specific office tasks, which includes receiving information, recording and storing information, structuring information, processing information, and providing access to information. Arora (2009) adds the economical factor and highlights the performing of tasks for business matters. Kaplan and Aronoff (1996) ultimately include the view of an office as a workplace and describe the office as a place

where information and knowledge are processed by organizations, such as filing, planning, designing, supervising, analyzing, deciding, and communicating. The authors also emphasize the need to coordinate these activities. The management-oriented definition by Kaplan and Aronoff is particularly fundamental for this thesis, as it provides a comprehensive understanding of office work. It represents the multifaceted nature of tasks undertaken in an office work setting while recognizing the office space as a physical workplace in an organizational environment. Furthermore, communication is acknowledged as a specific task and a central aspect of office work. Therefore, in order to understand how communication contributes to the perception of leadership tasks, including functions like decision-making, coordinating and supervising, a comprehensive understanding of office work in a physical, task-oriented and communicative manner is crucial.

Office work contains a wide range of activities that significantly contribute to the functioning and success of an organizations. Conventionally, office work is connected with the idea of employees sitting on a desk and engaging with computers (Panko, 1984). This perception finds validation in the research of (Engelen & Held, 2019) about workplace activities, in which employees report working at their desks approximately 67% of the time. However, office work implies a variety of other tasks such as a mixture of concentrated work, ad hoc meetings, breaks and business trips (Engelen & Held, 2019). Another crucial facet of office work lies in collaboration. Employees report that more than half of the meetings they attend involve six or more participants and breaks are frequently spend in the company of other employees (Engelen & Held, 2019). Results of the Global Workplace Survey Comparison even imply, that employees spend 42% of their time working with others, 28% of which in person. This highlights the role of interpersonal exchange and communication in an organizational office environment (Zahn, 1991). It not only represents the center of all workplace relationships, but also ensures that information is shared accurately and efficiently among team members, eventually fostering collaboration and teamwork (Fairhust, 2016; Katz & Kahn, 1978; MacMillan et al., 2004).

Moreover, technological components play a crucial role in office work environments. The most important technologies such as email, instant messaging, and video conferencing, constitute integral parts of workplace exchanges (Cakula & Pratt, 2021a). Recent findings indicate that, in addition to e-mails, chat programs for personal social messaging as well as

for work matters are frequently used communication tools among employees working in the office (Bloom et al., 2022).

As we look to trends and future developments in office work, an important focus lies on creating a foundation for combining different work models and creating sensible solutions. In this context, the Global Workplace Survey Comparison 2023 emphasizes the importance of workplace choice. It predicts that the workplace will have to provide choice in order to become a destination of choice (Global Workplace Survey Comparison, 2023). Furthermore, with the office remaining as a central component, adaptable spaces that can be used flexibly are increasingly gaining relevance. These spaces should inspire employees to perform at their best, using workspaces that are adaptable their personal work habits and preferences. Moreover, there will be a greater focus on creating connecting spaces that enable and encourage dialogue among the workforces.[1] Another emerging trend lies in the increasingly developing technology of Virtual Reality. This technology is already applied in several sectors and areas but has not yet fully established itself. Virtual reality could be useful for offices and employees to eliminate distractions, work more productively or increase collaboration and communication among a dispersed workforce. Another prediction, which includes all the factors already outlined, is the requirement to be agile and flexible and to be able to accept continuous innovation and changes to locations and processes, as the future working world will be characterized by these aspects. [2]

1.2 The Dynamic Evolution of Office Work Structures and the Role of Technology

A major change in the landscape of office work started to evolve from the 1980s when information and communication technologies started to receive more attention (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). The idea of working from other places than the office was first promoted by California-based companies such as Yahoo, known at this time under the term telecommuting or alternatively telework (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016; Nilles, 1994). The use of those technologies pursued the goal of supporting key business functions through the integration of telecommunication, data processing and personal computing (Irving &

[1] Retrieved from: https://www.hubstar.com/blog/hybrid-work-trends/#Hybrid_office_design_will_set_the_stage_for_purposeful_connection (24.09.2024)
[2] Retrieved from: https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2022/01/14/three-office-trends-that-will-shape-the-future-of-work/ (24.09.2024)

Higgins, 1991). The overall aim was to improve efficiency and make the work environment more convenient (Irving & Higgins, 1991).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, significant shifts took place with the emergence of teleconferencing, electronic mail and the rapid spread of the Internet and the World Wide Web (Wellman et al., 1996). In 1995, O'Brien compiled a collection of office applications, some of which are now obsolete or decreasing, while others continue to provide the foundation for modern office technologies. Part of the collection are electronic editing systems like electronic copying or text production and electronic communication systems such as electronic meetings, teleconferencing and telework. Furthermore, electronic document management systems such as multimedia and image or video processing as well as office management systems like electronic calendars, electronic office support or task management were included (O'Brien, 1995). These technologies began to replace traditional forms of work and communication and expanded the cost reduction possibilities for organizations (Wellman et al., 1996). Beyond those advantages, Toffler predicted a greater community stability, less pollution, thriving new industries and new family structures, which was confirmed by numerous studies at the time, positively underpinning this new way of working (Daniels, 1987; Kraut, 1989; Nilles, 1988; Olson, 1982). Based on these developments, telework increased slowly but steadily and Telework eventually spread out to other industries and countries (Haddon & Lewis, 1994). At this point, academic research increasingly focused on this topic and discussed its advantages and disadvantages (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Bailey & Kurland, 1999; Duxbury & Neufeld, 1999; Haddon & Lewis, 1994; Wellman et al., 1996).

Over the past decade, information technologies have constantly evolved and now offer more extensive and comprehensive functions (Cakula & Pratt, 2021). Especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of information and communication technologies has increased significantly. Recent research implies, that e-mails and phone calls are still the most popular channels of work communication (Pauga & Cakula, 2019). However, video calls developed into an important and frequently used channel that is considered as effective (Cakula & Pratt, 2021). This trend is reinforced by widely used platforms such as Microsoft Office and associated chat and meeting programs like Microsoft Teams. Moreover,

intelligent systems and chatbots have been increasingly integrated into organizational operations that enhance efficiency and convenience (Cakula & Pratt, 2021).

Over time, this development also changed the design of work locations and office spaces. Numerous organizations transitioned from conventional offices with fixed workplaces to innovative office allocations that embrace open and shared workspaces (Vos & Van der Voordt, 2002; Pullen & Bradley, 2004). While Baldry (1997) previously highlighted the importance of a personalized workspace as a territory that allows privacy, the contemporary trend seems to be developing in the opposite direction. Examples from practice are pioneering companies like Google and Amazon, which use open-plan office spaces to specifically stimulate creative thinking and collaboration between employees.[3] However, it is worth noting that the concept of an open-plan office is not new, and its effectiveness was already thematized in research articles published in the 1980s (Sundstrom et al., 1982).

Nevertheless, from there on research continuously discussed this type of office structure, identifying both advantages and disadvantages. Findings show that flexible workspaces can have a positive impact on productivity as well as the quality and quantity of work performed (Meijer et al., 2009). Furthermore, organizations can increase their flexibility and service costs can be reduced by embracing this approach (De Croon et al., 2005). However, research also identified potential risks in this development, showing that an openly designed office can be a stressor at the workplace, leading to psychological influences, reduced motivation and decreasing performance (Vischer, 2007). Another potential stressor arises from the disruption of familiar behaviors and environments in line with cognitive activation theory of stress, which implies that introducing employees in a new work environment is considered as one of the main stressors in the context of office work (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). It therefore becomes clear that the development process is still ongoing and that adjustments and further advancements in the ways of working are still necessary.

Looking back in the 1970s and 1980s, Jack Nilles and Allan Toffler foresaw that technological advancements would enable the future of work to shift away from traditional settings (Nilles, 1975; Toffler, 1980). Today, working from home or from alternative

[3] Retrieved from: https://loopphonebooths.com/what-we-can-learn-from-the-offices-of-amazon-facebook-and-google/

locations is no longer a rarity and is increasingly developing into the norm in organizations all over the world. The most common work models resulting from the development described above are therefore explained in detail below. For this reason, the most common and currently applied work models resulting from the development described above are explained in greater detail below.

1.3 Remote Work Defined - Evolution and Prevalence

The COVID-19 pandemic along with the associated lockdown revealed that remote work actually works and is applicable and feasible for more people than initially assumed (Gifford, 2022). Looking at the number of remote workers in an organizational context, the popularity is reflected in the figures on the general use of remote working solutions. In April 2020, at the time of the pandemic, 34% of the European population worked from home (Eurofound, 2022). Nevertheless, the concept was not widely applied from the beginning. Looking at its development over time, remote work has only been used within the telecommunications and computing industry for quite some time before it started spreading into various other industries (Raghuram, 2021). According to the Forbes business statistics, remote work is most frequently used in the computer and IT industry. This aligns with tasks in this sector often being of a digital nature and only requiring a stable internet connection. This sector is directly followed by marketing, accounting and finance and project management.[4]

A comprehensive review of the state of research on remote work reveals a diverse and expansive research landscape, with remote work being examined from various angles across multiple research fields. The largest part of research is conducted in psychology (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Toscano & Zappalà, 2021; Zoonena & Sivunen, 2022), management (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020; Gómez et al., 2020) and information technology (Ferreira et al., 2021; Staples, 1997). Within the field of psychology, much attention is directed toward exploring the interplay between remote work and productivity, as well as its impact on psychological factors such as distress, isolation, and well-being. Information technology research, on the other hand, focuses more on the technical background of remote work and the associated challenges, which is often closely connected to organizational and

[4] Retrieved from: https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/remote-work-statistics/#remote_work_by_industry_and_occupation_section (07.11.2023)

management aspects. The research field of management mainly refers to organizational aspects such as performance, efficiency, and the effects of remote work on work processes and management tactics.

Therefore, various definitions have evolved over the years, aiming to characterize this concept. One of the first terms that was used to describe the phenomenon of remote working was *telecommuting*. This indicates the possibility for employees of large organizations to work in offices close to their homes, instead of having to travel long distances to their central office (Nilles, 1975). The term *telecommuting* is often interchangeably used with the terms telework, remote work, virtual work or flexible work (Sokolic, 2022). Originally, *telecommuting* was introduced to help organizations reduce real estate costs and to minimize air pollution through traffic reduction and resulting the decrease fuel consumption (Egan, 1997; Handy & Mokhtarian, 1995; Nilles, 1994). At a later point, Nilles (1994) provided the first definition that considers the role of technology and communication. He defines *telecommuting* as work performed outside the conventional workplace with communication facilitated by telecommunications or digital technology (Nilles, 1994). In the beginning of the following century, Bailey and Kurland (2002) tie in with Nilles definition, characterizing telecommuting as work performed outside the office and further classifying it as an early form of virtual work.

With the current era defined by widespread internet access and extensive computerization, the term *telecommuting* or alternatively *telework* was eventually replaced by the nowadays more contemporary term *remote work* (Wontorczyk & Rożnowski, 2022). Olson (1983) offers a definition from a technological perspective and defines remote work in terms of office automation technology, that enables office workers to be potential telecommuters in the sense that their work can be carried out remotely with the support of computers and communication. A more recent definition out of the field of organizational management is put forth by Klopotek (2017) who considers the temporal aspect and defines remote work as a concept that allows employees to work flexible when it comes to work times, rather than having set office hours. Van Zoonen et al. (2021) defines remote work from a communication and organizational behavior background and integrates the aspect of supervision in his definition. He defines remote work as a practice in which some or all tasks are performed by an individual at a location outside the office, without direct oversight or

supervision from another person. As this thesis focuses on the remote work model, which involves the complete absence of the employee from the office, including the role of the leader or supervisor in this context, the definitions suggested by Klopotek (2017) and van Zoonen et al. (2021) are considered fundamental to this thesis.

It has become a matter of course that modern organizations offer a variety of options to meet the growing demand for greater work flexibility (Popovici & Popovici, 2020a). As previously defined, remote work is characterized by this local flexibility, allowing employees to work from various locations, including their homes, satellite offices, or any place other than the central office (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). This concept is associated with numerous advantages, such as empowering workers to better manage their daily lives and balance work and personal responsibilities, ultimately positively impacting their work-life balance, motivation, and productivity (Ferreira et al., 2021). Furthermore, remote work offers advantages such as increased productivity, time savings from reduced commuting, and flexible working hours, which are essential motivators for employees (Klopotek, 2017a; Popovici & Popovici, 2020a). From an organizational point of view, the advantages encompass increasing internal flexibility as well as the potential for cost reduction (Ferreira et al., 2021). Moreover, study results reported positive management effects, such as greater efficiency and productivity, faster execution of work tasks and a higher employee loyalty towards the employer (Canedo et al., 2017).

However, the remote work model also comes with challenges. Some of those challenges have already bin overcome. While it was initially feared that some activities could not be carried out from home, the sudden restructuring necessitated by the pandemic led to successful re-designing processes in many cases (Gandrita et al., 2022). Moreover, the above-described forced flexibility also led to positive outcomes such as an improved work life balance (Franken et al., 2021). However, other challenges remained. For instance, building and maintaining an organizational culture and effectively tracking employee working hours and performance can be more complex when the workforce is dispersed remotely (Popovici & Popovici, 2020a). Commonly mentioned concerns on behalf of the employees also include the difficulty in separating private matters from professional ones and the risk of social isolation (Klopotek, 2017a). Moreover, study findings show that remote work was perceived negatively by employees, as they developed a fear of job insecurity and

perceived a lack of social protection (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Heymann et al., 2020). Another disadvantage lies in the change of teamwork and management dynamics as well as social communication, which according to study findings influences the effectiveness of employees (Miheenkova et al., 2020).

Just as office spaces require essential equipment for employees to successfully carry out their work, remote work environments require technological equipment too (Ilag, 2021). As remote work can be seen as a result of the information and communication technologies transformation, the functionality of the technological framework is crucial to successfully implement and carry out remote work (Wontorczyk & Rożnowski, 2022). Major focal points thereby lie in the availability of technology, the functionality of the chosen communication tools and the ability of employees to actually use the tools effectively (Cakula & Pratt, 2021). Communication and information technology is described in the literature as fundamental for organizations to achieve their goals in an increasingly dynamic environment and a key factor for successful remote work (Myers, 2015; Shockley et al., 2021). Thus, organizations must integrate intelligent business software and tools that facilitate communication and collaboration (Willcocks, 2020). One of the most essential communication and collaboration tools for most organizations is Microsoft Teams, which allows the workforce to structure their tasks, have conversations and group chats, set meetings, have video calls and conferences and share files (Ilag, 2021). Other examples are technologies such as mobile phones for work purposes, E-Mail, Skype and office automation systems (Wang et al., 2020). The importance and consistency of these technologies are reinforced and further driven by the constant rise of digital tools and platforms that enable tasks to be carried out remotely.[5] Companies like Yahoo were early adopters of these so-called information and communication technologies in the 1980s to enable telecommuting at that time (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). Nowadays cheaper, smaller and increasingly connected devices such as smartphones and tablet computers are widely available, that enable employees to stay connected, even if they are dispersed in time and place (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). Failing to implement these technologies effectively can disrupt routines and interrupt

[5] Retrieved from: https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/remote-work-statistics/#remote_work_by_industry_and_occupation_section (29.09.2024)

workflows which can eventually result in not achieving goals and ultimately decreasing productivity (Ilag, 2021).

Looking at the advantages of successfully implemented communication and information technologies, a frequently discussed topic in the research field is the potential capabilities that emerging technologies offer to users (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). Potentials for organizations and employees are for example the aspects of time saving and bridging distance while securing the quality or quantity of work output (Ilag, 2021). Moreover, these potentials are closely connected to cost reduction possibilities (Ilag, 2021). Furthermore, the possibility of sharing knowledge online and therefore the potential increase of productivity represents an important advantage (Haas et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2020). Moreover, technological advancements like cloud data storage, automated workflows, event planning and scheduling tools, and enhanced data security through end-to-end encryption provide new opportunities for efficient work and communication in remote environments (Ilag, 2021).

However, the use of communication and information technologies in a remote work environment is also one of the factors identified by professionals as a cause for concern (Ferreira et al., 2021). Literature uniformly acknowledges that a virtual work environment creates challenges for interaction and exchange in between teams. Hülsheger et al. (2009) for example emphasize the influence of a virtual work environment on a shared understanding of goals and tasks and eventually on the effectiveness of a team. This is supported by Guinea et al. (2012), who found that virtual teams have a lower communication frequency, reduced knowledge sharing, and lower satisfaction levels, which eventually results in a lower team performance. Hence, it is crucial for organizations to provide the technological resources such as hardware, internet support and suitable communication tools (Sull et al., 2020). This is also reflected in survey results about the factors that help employees transition to remote work. Mostly mentioned by approximately 45% of all respondents were company-provided or -subsidized technology including hardware, high-bandwidth home Wi-Fi, or office furniture as well as communication platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams (Sull et al., 2020).

Looking at the overall trends and future developments of remote work, a highly debated subject is the possibility to track the performance of remote working employees. According to a report by Forbes Advisor, 60% of companies use monitoring software to track their

workforce. A fundamental issue in this regard has always been the aspect of cybersecurity and privacy. It therefore will remain an important topic to further develop effective remote work policies and security practices.[6] Furthermore, KPMG (2023) predicts that international remote working will increasingly normalize in certain industries and companies will continuously adapt and improve their remote programs. Moreover, the development of a uniform way of remote working across borders is a key aspect, that will increasingly receive attention in the future.

1.4 Hybrid Work Models: Bridging the Gap Between On-site and Remote Work

Predictions that assumed an entirely remote future of work have not yet materialized, as pluralities still prefer to work in person, at least on a part-time basis (Piacenza & He, 2023). Results of the WFH Report demonstrate that as of 2023, only 12.7% of full-time employees work from home (Barrero et al., 2023). Moreover, the report reveals that a significant proportion of people do not only work remotely, but both from home and from an organizational workplace, which can be referred to as hybrid work (Halford, 2005). Recent statistics reveal that 46.8% of full-time employees with the capability to work remotely, participate in a hybrid work arrangement, underscoring it's significance for the future of work (Barrero et al., 2023). Typically, this concept implies two to three days each week at home and the remainder of workdays in the office (Bloom, Han & Liang, 2022).

The topic of hybrid work, a dynamic and evolving concept, is studied across various academic disciplines, such as information technology (Halford, 2005a; Triyason et al., 2020), management (Bloom et al., 2022; Hilberath et al., 2020), education (Bowen et al., 2013; Shetu et al., 2021) and communication (Taiminen et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2023). The research area of information technology investigates the technical prerequisites that enable hybrid working and hybrid such as the provision of hybrid learning spaces or the development of efficient hybrid mechanisms. Educational research focuses on education under the conditions of hybrid work, including among other things the implementation of hybrid learning solutions and its assessment. The research in management mainly centers around hybrid work in economical work environments, examining hybrid team management,

[6] Retrieved from: https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/remote-work-statistics/#sources_section (29.09.2024)

technology in the hybrid workplace or the effects on employee performance. Communication research focuses more on the information sharing perspective of hybrid work and the perception of communication technologies as well as the communicative aspects of organizations. Since this work examines the facets of communication and interpersonal exchange in the context of hybrid work, the field of communication studies is considered fundamental for this research.

Given its multifaceted nature, numerous definitions have emerged in the research to date. Bloom et al. (2022) adopt a practical approach conceptualizing the idea of hybrid work as a division of the employees' working week in tasks that are best done in person and tasks that are best done individually. Foster et al. (2015) define hybrid work by its degree of virtuality, which includes operating from diverse locations with varying degrees of virtuality. Halford (2005) offers a more technological perspective that includes the social component and defines hybrid work as working both from home as well as in an organizational setting and making use of information and communication technologies to meet working demands and maintain relationships within the organization. He further describes hybrid work as a model that facilitates collaboration across various locations (Halford, 2005). Cousins (2007) view hybrid work out of people-centric perspective and define hybrid team members as relying on face-to-face and electronic communication on an everyday basis. For the purposes this study, the technological as well as the practical aspect is necessary to fully understand the concept of hybrid work, which makes the definition of Halford (2005) and Cousins (2007) fundamental for this work.

In recent years, hybrid work has fundamentally and permanently transformed the way we work, although the concept is not new. In the early 2000s, hybrid work was already a popular and widely adopted work model and much more common than remote work (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). However, it has grown significantly in recent years, particularly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ateeq, 2022; Bloom et al., 2022). As already emphasized by the provided definitions above, hybrid work characterizes itself by a mix of team members, where some are physically present in a central office while others work remotely, or by fully distributed teams where all members collaborate from various locations using virtual communication tools (Caputo et al., 2024). In high virtuality contexts, interactions are primarily technology-mediated, and teams are more geographically

dispersed, whereas low virtuality contexts involve less reliance on technology and less spatial dispersion (Purvanova & Bono, 2009). Therefore, hybrid work can be carried out in various forms. Gratton (2021) emphasizes two key aspects in this regard: place and time. In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift along the place axis, from being place-constrained and working on-site to being place-unconstrained, allowing employees to work from anywhere (Gratton, 2021). A similar shift can be observed along the time axis, transitioning from being time-constrained (working simultaneously with others) to time-unconstrained (allowing employees to work at their preferred hours). Gratton (2021) names five essentials along two axes in order to design the concept of hybrid work successfully: energy, focus, coordination, and cooperation. A critical aspect lies in recognizing the interplay between these drivers, facilitating strategic planning within the context of hybrid work (Gratton, 2021). For instance, for an employee with a high need for focus over several hours for a task, the time factor plays a greater role, which means that the employee can complete these tasks just as well at home if this location allows for greater focus (Gratton, 2021). Applying this to the example of a team leader, the critical driver is coordination in the context of time. The team leader needs to coordinate the fulfilment of feedback, debate, conversations, coaching, and many other tasks (Gratton, 2021). Furthermore, leaders need to coordinate their own work with the work of their dispersed team members synchronously, which makes the process significantly more complex (Gratton, 2021b). In this context, successful hybrid work extends beyond the commonly known routine, involving a commitment to continual learning, a critical examination of how work and communication is carried out, and the aim of automizing work processes (Gratton, 2021).

Compared to the fully remote work model, hybrid work offers the unique advantage of a combination of in-person and virtual experiences. As video calls limit the ability to assess body language and may lead to misinterpretations, hybrid work allows for face-to-face interactions to better interpret colleagues' personalities and apply these insights in virtual settings, facilitating stronger working relationships (Fayard et al., 2021). Moreover, research findings show that hybrid working arrangements are highly valued by employees, which results in lower rates of staff turnover and increased job satisfaction (Bloom et al., 2022). For the period of time in which work is conducted from home, the advantages mentioned for remote working also apply here, such as increased flexibility and a better work-life balance (Ferreira et al., 2021). Yet, working in a hybrid work model also implies time spent in the

office, which takes on a significant role as a balance for remote work. Fayard et al. (2021) describe the role of the office in the hybrid work system as a cultural space[7], giving employees a sense of social anchorage, fostering interpersonal connections, facilitating learning opportunities, and encouraging innovative collaborations. The office functions as a space for employees to build work relationships, solve complex problems in collaboration with their team, and gain knowledge about the organization and its culture (Fayard et al., 2021). Research shows that, compared to fully remote work, hybrid work reduces the risk of social isolation and allows employees to engage in corporate culture and build relationships (Choudhury et al., 2022).

However, the increased dynamic of changing work environments also contains disadvantages. Although the number of communication technology solutions are steadily increasing, hybrid work still raises the barriers in terms of collaboration and exchange (Waizenegger et al., 2020). The concept drastically reduces the likelihood for spontaneous interactions among employees at work and diminishes ad-hoc conversations about their current projects, tasks, or personal matters (Waizenegger et al., 2020). In this regard, recent study results from Teng-Calleja et al. (2023) report a lack of effective interaction, alignment and trust. Moreover, hybrid work leads to higher virtuality, even if in-person office attendance is possible. Research results from Bloom et al. (2022) demonstrates that the availability of hybrid working options increased messaging and video calls, even when all of the employees were working in the office. One potential explanation for this phenomenon could be that the outsized number of virtual meetings negatively affects face-to-face collaboration, as employees are too exhausted for further exchange (Waizenegger et al., 2020). On the one hand, this underlines a permanent shift towards technology, regardless of the possibility of personal exchange that is provided in the office.

Recognizing the role of enabling technology for hybrid work is therefore fundamental (Fayard et al., 2021). The focus is hereby changing towards digital collaboration platforms that form the basis for effective communication, knowledge sharing and joint decision-making (Waizenegger et al., 2020). The evolution of information and communication technologies has highlighted the potential for transforming environments outside the

[7] Cultural space as a space that contains the company's beliefs, values and attitudes influencing employees' behaviors.

conventional office into remote workspaces (Fayard et al., 2021). The basic technologies such as smartphones, tablets, and computers build the foundation for the implementation. However, it is the seamless integration of communication platforms, tools, and collaborative software that eventually enables effective and efficient hybrid work (Fayard et al., 2021; Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). Of particular relevance are video- and audio-based meeting technologies such as Microsoft Teams, Microsoft Surface Hub or Skype for Business and Cloud solutions for data sharing and exchange (Saatc et al., 2019; Waizenegger et al., 2020). These technologies enable real-time communication, file sharing, and collaborative editing, allowing teams to work together effectively from different locations (Olson & Olson, 2000). The focus of these technologies is to enable employees to share the same space and web, even if they physically do not (Cakula & Pratt, 2021). Another key technological component of hybrid work is the use of remote access technologies (Bloom et al., 2022). These technologies enable employees to access their work resources and systems from anywhere, allowing them to work remotely without any limitations (Waizenegger et al., 2020). These access technologies include virtual private networks (VPNs), remote desktop software, and cloud-based storage solutions (Bloom et al., 2022).

Examining the current trends and future developments in the field of hybrid work, several aspects could be identified, carrying implications for the future. Anthony A. Parzanese, SVP, Global Head of Real Estate & Workplace Evolution at Dow Jones, along with Anna Weeden, Workplace Evolution Program Manager at Dow Jones underscore the necessity, of continuous monitoring of evolving human behavior and workplace dynamics to refine and optimize the overall employee experience.[8] Moreover, an increasing role for internal experts specializing in hybrid work can be anticipated, which will enable organizations to adopt a more strategic approach in incorporating innovative solutions and drawing valuable lessons from past experiences. This shift towards greater reliance on internal expertise highlights the importance of a constant and meaningful dialogue between organizations and their employees. This type of communication is fundamental in shaping and enhancing superior

[8] Retrieved from: https://www.forbes.com/sites/glebtsipursky/2023/07/15/redefining-the-future-of-flexible-work/ (29.09.2024)

hybrid work experiences, setting the stage for a more efficient and improved hybrid work environment. [9]

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Foundations of Leadership Communication

As this thesis examines the above-described work models in the context of perceived leadership communication, the following chapter addresses the theoretical foundations of leadership communication. First, leadership is defined and categorized in the current state of research, followed by an outline of transformational leadership theory. Subsequently, leadership communication as well as its effectiveness is and perceived leadership communication is theoretically outlined, substantiated. In the second part of the theoretical foundation, Transformational Leadership and leadership communication are classified within a virtual environment. Thereafter, practices of effective virtual leadership communication are presented, followed by a literature review of perceived leadership communication in contemporary work environments.

2.1 A Framework of Leadership Communication

2.1.1 Leadership at a Glance

Leadership represents a complex and widely debated concept, with various interpretations and applications across different fields of study. The topic of leadership is of great interest in numerous areas of research such as organizational psychology (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005), management (Barrow, 1977), education (Bolden et al., 2008; Bowers, 2017), ethics (Ciulla, 1995; Den Hartog, 2015), politics (Edwards et al., 2022; Morrell & Hartley, 2006) and many more.

Therefore, leadership as a multifaceted topic is defined in various ways in the existing literature. defines leadership from a management perspective as “the behavioral process of influencing individuals or groups toward set goals” (Barrow, 1977, p. 232). In the subsequent and more recent definitions, researchers have given more and more importance to the role of the followers. Winston and Patterson (2006, p.7) give a more integrated definition of leadership and describe a leader as “one or more people who selects, equips,

[9] Retrieved from: https://www.forbes.com/sites/glebtsipursky/2023/07/15/redefining-the-future-of-flexible-work/ (29.09.2024)

trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives.". While Barrow's definition focuses solely on influencing employees as a means to a positive organizational outcome, Winston and Patterson include the individual characteristics and abilities of employees and consider the unlocking of these characteristics as the key to organizational success. This highlights the increasing focus on followers that has been later adopted by other authors in their definitional approaches. For instance, Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) align with this follower-focused viewpoint and further emphasize that leadership is a continuous process, collaboratively shaped through social and relational exchanges between leaders and their teams. This underlines the importance of the employees in an organizational context as leadership is not possible without followership.

Bass and Bass (2009) argue that finding a single, absolute definition for leadership is impractical because the suitable definition depends on the researcher's specific focus and the subject of the research being conducted. As this thesis focuses on employees' perceptions of leadership communication, a people-centered perspective is fundamental to provide the theoretical basis for the further examination of this topic. This work therefore views leadership as a process of exchange between leader and followers, with the leader aiming to positively influence as well as promote and develop the individual abilities and skills of the employee, and thus to achieve organizational goals (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Winston & Patterson, 2006b).

To better understand how employees perceive communicative interactions within leader-follower relationships, it is essential to examine key factors that leadership literature highlights as fundamental to effective leadership. In this context, Transformational Leadership Theory, one of the most widely recognized and cited leadership models, offers valuable insights into how leaders inspire and motivate their employees. Therefore, before diving deeper into the theoretical foundations regarding leadership communication, the following section explores transformational leadership theory in greater detail (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978).

2.1.2 The Theory of Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership theory, originally developed by Burns (1978) and later enhanced by Bass (1985a), has received significant attention from researchers in the field of organizational leadership over the past decades. It embodies a practicable approach to leadership behavior and still represents a widely discussed and applied theoretical framework. Bass highlights that transformational leaders do not simply set up meetings or agreements. Transformational leaders inspire their followers to achieve superior results by helping them to align their values with the values of the organization (Bass, 1999). To do so, four components of transformational leadership are suggested, which include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985).

The component of *idealized influence* explains how transformational leaders behave in order to becoming role models for their followers. It's important that followers can relate to their leaders and attribute exceptional qualities, persistence, and determination to them. Idealized influence can thus be divided into two aspects: the leader's behavior and the attributes followers ascribe to the leader. Leaders with a high degree of idealized influence own characteristic features such as the will to take risks, consistency rather than arbitrariness and the application of high ethical and moral standards. Looking at research findings on the practical impact of idealized influence, a positive correlation between this leadership component and the commitment of employees towards their organization becomes clear (Afshari, 2022). The identified motivation perceived by employees thereby functions as an important mediator (Afshari, 2022). Moreover, a significant positive influence on the performance of employees was identified (Ngaithe et al., 2016). On the one hand, this illustrates the connection between identified motivation and employee performance and, on the other hand, demonstrates the decisive role that the practice of idealized influence plays with regard to the overall organizational success.

The second aspect of *inspirational motivation*, which is closely connected to the concept of idealized influence, implies, that the way transformational leaders behave is orientated towards motivating and inspiring followers through the communication of meaning and challenge in their work. Central to this is fostering team spirit and transmitting enthusiasm and optimism. Leaders actively engage followers by encouraging them to envision improved

future states and clearly articulating requirements and goals, while projecting a shared vision. The impact of successfully implemented inspirational motivation is also reflected in current research results. Similar to the concept of idealized influence, successfully implemented inspirational motivation was found to have a positive influence on employee performance (Ngaithe et al., 2016). Furthermore, research findings report that inspirational motivation significantly increases job satisfaction as well as general happiness at work, which eventually results in more positive employee characteristics such as independent, thinking, pro-activeness or innovativeness (Njiraini et al., 2018; Salas-Vallina et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2009). Since job satisfaction is significantly influenced by motivation and leadership and motivation and job satisfaction are an indicator for increased employee performance, the role of successfully applied inspirational motivation for organizational success becomes evident (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020).

Transformational leaders employing intellectual stimulation encourage innovation and creativity in their followers by questioning assumptions, redefining problems, and exploring familiar situations from alternative viewpoints . The focus lies on the promotion of creativity while avoiding public criticism of individual mistakes. Actively seeking new ideas and creative problem-solving approaches is seen as a key practice. Therefore, followers are not only encouraged to explore and pursue new approaches, but their ideas are valued as much as the leader's own, irrespective of hierarchal differences. When looking at respective research findings on this leadership practice, a strong relationship between intellectual stimulation and general team learning becomes apparent (Sánchez-Cardona et al., 2018). Moreover, a positive influence on job satisfaction and organizational commitment could be determined (Cahyono et al., 2020). Study results also confirm the promotion of creativity envisioned in the transformational leadership theory. According to these findings, leader intellectual stimulation has a positive influence on the creative performance of employees, partially mediated by job autonomy and creative ability (Thuan, 2019). Taken together, these results illustrate the practical impacts of this leadership practice, particularly with regard to employees.

Individualized consideration implies that leaders prioritize addressing the unique needs for achievement and personal growth of each follower, taking on the role of a mentor. This approach aims to unlock the follower's potential and is fostering a positive and supportive

climate that offers new learning opportunities. Acknowledging and respecting individual differences in the needs of each follower is integral, promoting a two-way exchange in communication. The practice of "Management by walking around" in workspaces reinforces this philosophy, enabling leaders to engage in personal, continuous interactions that continuously grows. Followers are not just seen as employees but as complete individuals with diverse needs. Listening is recognized as a crucial leadership skill, and tasks are delegated strategically to promote the personal development of followers. Furthermore, continuous monitoring is undertaken to potentially offer support while avoiding the sense of being constantly observed. Here, too, research indicates a positive relationship between the practice of individualized consideration and employee performance (Cahyono et al., 2020; Top et al., 2020). Furthermore, the study findings additionally reveal that the component of individualized consideration is particularly relevant with regard to the implementation of idealized influence, as it inspires employees to accept their leader as a role model (Khan et al., 2022). This relationship is additionally strengthened by the practices of inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation (Khan et al., 2022).

Ultimately, these four components underscore that people performing transformational leadership typically embody high internal values and ideals and are effective at inspiring followers to act in ways that contribute to the common good, prioritizing collective benefit over individual interests (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1994; Northouse, 2019). Moreover, it became apparent that the components of transformational leadership not only have individual effects on employees and organizations, but that their implementation also influences the effectiveness of the other components (Khan et al., 2022). Consequently, it is sensible to look at the results of studies that have considered transformational leadership as an overall concept, including all of the four components.

As reflected in the empirical results on the respective components, research findings show that successfully implemented transformational leadership has an impact on employee satisfaction and their commitment to the organization (Hatter & Bass, 1988; Koh et al., 1995). Furthermore, a positive influence of transformational leadership on the acceptance of change was identified (Tayal et al., 2018). This has been particularly important in recent years, as organizations have been confronted with a significant amount of change due to digitalization and external influences such as the COVID-19 pandemic. To successfully

implement change through transformational leadership, literature particularly highlights the ability of a leader to communicate a strong and inspiring vision of the organization (Jensen et al., 2018; Yue et al., 2019). Furthermore, through communication in transformational leadership, employees are enabled to increase their performance to a level beyond expectations (Bass, 1985). Based on this, communication can be described as indispensable for successfully implemented transformational leadership. As the communicative aspect of leadership represents a focal point of this thesis, the following chapter therefore further outlines and theoretically categorizes the concept of leadership communication.

2.1.3 A Comprehensive View on Leadership Communication

While there are many opinions and little agreement on the attributes defining a good leader, research agrees on the fact that good communication skills are fundamental (Clutterbuck & Hirst, 2002). Reflecting on the commonly known quote from Watzlawick et al. (1967) who state that leaders "cannot not communicate" (p.49), the importance and the necessity of categorizing leadership communication from all angles becomes evident. Examining the research landscape reveals a long history associated with this topic (Barge & Schlueter, 1991; Fairhurst, 2008; Goldhaber et al., 1978). Leadership communication research can be mainly found in the fields of organizational communication (Fairhurst, 2001, Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014), management (Barge & Schlueter, 1991; Clutterbuck & Hirst, 2002), communication studies (Jiang & Luo, 2018; Kraut, 1989), psychology (Arendt et al., 2019; Schneider et al., 2015) and ethics (Ciulla, 1995; Knights & O'Leary, 2006).

Resulting, leadership communication is defined in various ways in current literature, all representing different focal points in their approaches. Barrett (2006) focuses on the influential character of leadership communication and defines it as a monitored and targeted transfer of meaning, which is used by leaders to influence an individual, a group, an organization, or a whole community. Barrett (2006) focuses on the influential nature of leadership communication, characterizing it as a specific and purposeful transfer of meaning, employed by leaders to influence individuals, groups, organizations, or entire communities. Hackman and Johnson (1996) bring together both terms of leadership and communication and define such as following: "Leadership is human (symbolic) communication that modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs." (Hackman & Johnson, 1996). Johansson et al. (2011) deliver a more individualized

and behavior-focused approach and define a communicative leader as someone who "(…) engages employees in dialogue, actively shares and seeks feedback, practices participative decision-making and is perceived as open and involved" (p.155). Ruben and Gigliotti (2016) considered success as a determinant factor, characterizing leadership communication as equally dependent on followers and their needs, sensibilities, and perceptions as on the efforts made by leaders. For the purpose of this study the approaches of Johannson et al. (2011) as well as Ruben and Gigliotti (2016) are considered particularly relevant. Johannson et al. (2011) integrate specific communicative behaviors, shed light on the interactive character of leadership communication and include both parties, the leader as well as the employee. Ruben and Gigliotti (2016) additionally highlight the importance of employee outcomes rather than a leadership focus. This aspect represents the core intention of this study and is essential in order to investigate the perception of communicative behavior by the employees while determining important leadership communication functions and tasks that need to be considered.

Looking at the current state of research, three approaches can be identified from which leadership communication was viewed. Based on the classification by (Johansson, 2018), the first approach focusses on leadership communication as a tool, the second on the leaders' communicative behavior in leader-member communication and the third on the communicative constitution of leadership. The first viewpoint of leadership as a tool describes the transmission of information in order to influence employees, which is also described as superior-subordinate communication (Johansson, 2018). This implies a stronger focus on the effects of power, interpersonal communication dynamics between leaders and employees, trust relationships and perceptions of the information coming from the leader (Johansson, 2018). The second aspect of leaders' communicative behavior is rooted in the research field of psychology, where originally a more cognitive approach was applied (Johansson, 2018). Here, leaders providing employees with a sense of purpose, direction and identity represents an important focal point (Johansson, 2018). Furthermore, the influence of evolving work settings is considered and a strong focus on employee needs is visible (Johansson, 2018). The third viewpoint suggests that communication constitutes an organization rather than being an aspect that is being included in the organization (Tompkins, 1984). This implies the idea that the shaping and reshaping of a social order happens through the interaction and communication between individuals that are actively

participating in this process (Tompkins, 1984). This interpretive perspective that views communication as socially constructed by interactions, symbols, words and actions stood against the more rational view of functionalists, which led researchers to focus more on qualitative methods, such as observations and interviews (Johansson, 2018). As this thesis examines on the one hand the perceived successful use of leadership communication as a tool in the various work models and on the other hand evolving work settings and the associated changes in leadership communication, the first two approaches form the basis for this thesis.

In a workplace, communication competence is essential to business success (Jablin & Sias, 2001). The past research already highlighted, that the quality of communication between a leader and an employee significantly impacts individual as well as organizational outcomes (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Leadership communication represents a critical factor in employee motivation and performance and further develops the commitment of employees towards their organizations (Levering, 1988; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2002; M. Mayfield, 2000). Moreover, study results imply that leadership communication can be seen as a key to employee success and impacts job satisfaction as well as the perceived credibility of the supervisor (Clifton & Harter, 2019; Mikkelson et al., 2017, 2019; Mikkelson & Sloan, 2020). Given these results, the importance of the effectiveness of leadership communication becomes evident. Therefore, the concept of leader communication effectiveness will be outlined and conceptualized in the following.

2.1.4 The Concept of Leader Communication Effectiveness

Leadership effectiveness is generally understood to go hand in hand with communication effectiveness (Klauss & Bass, 1982). Clutterbuck and Hirst emphasize that for every skill that a leader needs to own to be successful, effective communication represents the foundation (Clutterbuck & Hirst, 2002). This is reflected in the history of communication studies, which is deeply connected to the aspect of competency (Spitzberg, 2000). Communicative competence in general consists of two fundamental aspects, the effectiveness and the appropriateness of communication (Rickheit et al., 2008). While appropriateness relates to the situational conditions of communication and the actual social interaction, communication effectiveness describes the outcome of communicative

competence (Rickheit et al., 2008). As this thesis focuses on the perceived outcome of communication actions of leaders by the employees of organizations, the term effectiveness will further be used to address this concept.

Parks defines communication effectiveness as the extent to which a communicator achieves communication objectives (Parks, 1985). Communication effectiveness thus contains the ability to achieve or to infer a speaker's meaning or to the accomplishment of the target behind this intent (Rickheit et al., 2008). This presupposes, that communication objectives exist and that communicators are aware of these objectives (Spitzberg, 2000). According to Rubin (Rubin, 1994), "communication competence requires knowledge of appropriate and effective communication behaviors, a repertoire of skills which correspond to that knowledge, and the motivation to perform these skills in a socially effective and appropriate manner" (p. 75). On this basis, the extent to which a communicator is perceived as competent depends on the use of motivation, knowledge and skill (Cupach et al., 2009; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Mikkelson et al. (2021) suggests a more recent and integrative approach that includes the role of a leader and describe effective communication as clear and goal-orientated, enabling employees to accomplish work-related tasks with efficiency in an organizational context. For the purpose of this thesis, both the fundamental understanding of communication effectiveness and the individual-related perspective from Mikkelson et al. (2021) must be included in the subsequent stages in order to create an all-encompassing basis.

Looking at the current state of research, multiple reasons arise why the effectiveness of a leader's communication plays an important role in an organizational context. Literature agrees on the fact that effective leadership communication provides distinct direction for the team in order to achieve organizational objectives (Verburg et al., 2013). More specifically, it enables the leader to work in a goal-oriented way in order to achieve specific outcomes and communication objectives (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). This in turn has the potential to eventually increase the overall team performance (DeSanctis & Monge, 2006; Verburg et al., 2013). Furthermore, effective leader communication reinforces a corporate culture defined by coordination and collaboration among employees, which positively affects employee engagement (Zaccaro et al., 2001; Zander et al., 2013). Moreover, study results show that the effective use of communication by a supervisor is related to employees' job

satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment (Madlock, 2008; Mikkelson et al., 2015; Steele & Plenty, 2015).

Research suggests a number of key aspects that enable and favor effective communication. Mikkelson et al. (2017) emphasize, that when leaders communicate their expectations, procedures and objectives with clarity, employees are more proficient in carrying out their job responsibilities. This has also been highlighted in prior research. Eisenberg and Witten (1987) stated, that employees are only able to complete tasks successfully, when their supervisors are direct and clear in their communication. Furthermore, clear communication belongs to the characteristics of a transformational leader, as they are having a clear vision of the future that needs to be communicated through a clear direction (Johansson, 2018).

Another aspect that was identified as important for effective leadership communication is communication frequency (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008; Johansson, 2018). Frequency has drawn attention in the research field as an important communicative factor with significant organizational and employee outcomes (Becerra & Gupta, 2003; Gajendran & Joshi, 2012). Research shows, that frequent leadership communication positively influences trust and strengthens the commitment of the employee towards the organization (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008; Jiang & Luo, 2018).

Furthermore, transparent communication represents an important factor for leadership communication (Jiang & Luo, 2018). Transparent communication implies that employees are receiving constant information from their leaders and are actively included in participating through information dissemination (Rawlins, 2009). Study results show that communicating transparently positively influences employee engagement, the attitude and trust of employees towards their organization (Jiang & Luo, 2018).

While there has been comparably little empirical research that explicitly measured leader communication effectiveness, the overlap of transformational leadership and effective communication is evident. Various studies already linked these two components and emphasized their interconnectedness (Momeny & Gourgues, 2019; Neufeld et al., 2010; Yue et al., 2019). Bass highlights in his theory that leaders can transform their followers through raising their awareness of task significance, directing their attention towards team or organizational goals and activating their sophisticated needs (Bass, 1985). This can in turn

be achieved through the above-mentioned idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). Acknowledging the fact that transformational leadership and the appropriate expression of the four components depends on effective communication is critical (Momeny & Gourgues, 2019).

Conger and Kanungo (1998) pointed out in this regard, that for a charismatic leader having visions and plans on how to achieve them is not enough. Leaders must also be able to effectively articulate those strategies and visions and influence their followers (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). The leader is responsible to support their employees in understanding the purpose and meaning of their activities, which is to a great extent achieved through language and interpersonal communication (Pondy, 1978). Effective personal communication skills thereby enable leaders to disseminate a strong and powerful vision to their followers (Bass, 1985). Specific measures for leaders to communicate this vision effectively can include, for example, the use of metaphors, symbols, imagery and persuasive argumentation (Bass, 1985).

2.1.5 Perceived Leadership Communication

In addition to the above-noted influence of effective leadership communication on organizational aspects as well as employee commitment, satisfaction and motivation, another important focal point becomes evident, which is the importance of employee perceptions in regard to their supervisor. Study results show that effective leader communication can have an impact on the employees' perceptions of their leader's credibility and resulting on their overall satisfaction with their leader (Berman & Hellweg, 1989; Mikkelson et al., 2021). Therefore, perceived leadership communication will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter.

Despite abundant evidence from both research and practical experience highlighting the importance of a leader's communication skills (De Vries et al., 2010; Gamble & Gamble, 2013; Landry, 2019), leaders themselves may lack awareness of their own way of communication and how it is perceived by their employees (Rizvi & Popli, 2021). The relevance of perceived leader communication becomes apparent in a quote from Spitzberg (Spitzberg, 2000) who states that "good communication is located in perception rather than behavior" (Spitzberg, 2000). Ruben and Gigliotti (2016) emphasize that communication

outcomes, meanings, and interpretations are collaboratively shaped by the interaction between leaders and followers. On this basis the effectiveness can imply two different types of objectives, the ones implied by the communicator and those identified by the observers (Spitzberg, 2000). The objectives intended by the communicator are only visible to the communicator, as external persons have no access to his thoughts or feelings (Spitzberg, 2000). In turn, if objectives are perceived in a different way or are laid upon the communicator, the relevance or importance of that objective can hardly be determined (Spitzberg, 2000).

Besides the above-mentioned influences on aspects such as supervisor credibility and their overall perception of their leader's performance, various other effects and outcomes of perceived leadership communication are highlighted in current research. Study results from Newman et al. (2020) highlight the relation between the employee's perception of their leader's communication effectiveness and the perceived individual performance. Furthermore, the employees` perception was also found to be related to the perception of the overall team performance, which could eventually affect the actual performance outcomes (Newman et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is likely that employees grow frustrated when their leaders fail to communicate effectively (Rizvi & Popli, 2021).

Figure 1

Transformational Leadership and Communication Effectiveness

Summarizing the ideas presented above, it becomes evident that transformational leadership is connected to successful leader communication and leader communication effectiveness as it involves inspiring and motivating followers towards a collective vision. Transformational leaders excel in articulating this vision, fostering open communication, and building strong relationships within their teams. Moreover, the effectiveness of leader communication within the transformational leadership framework lies in its ability to provide a sense of

purpose and inspire followers to surpass their own expectations. It became apparent that when followers perceive their leaders as effective and transformational communicators, it contributes to a positive perception of overall leader communication effectiveness. This connection underlines the presented effect chain (Figure 1), which indicates that the communicative elements of transformational leadership influence the effectiveness of leader communication which in turn affects how the communication effectiveness of a leader is perceived.

2.2 Leadership Communication in Virtual Work Environments

2.2.1 Transformational Leadership through a Virtual Lens

Bass highlights the increase of motivation in a team and the change of external circumstances as focal points of transformational leadership (Bass, 1999). As the digitalization as well as the COVID-19 pandemic caused fundamental change in the workplace setting as well as the communicative exchange, the relevance of the connection of transformational leadership and virtual work environments becomes obvious. Research is still divided when it comes to differentiating between the leadership styles of virtual and traditional leaders. Some findings suggest that, on average, leaders who utilize technology-mediated communication tend to demonstrate the same leadership style comparable to that of traditional face-to-face leaders (Avolio & Kahai, 2003; Zigurs, 2003) Other results indicate that leaders adapt their leadership behavior to the situational requirements of a virtual environment (James & White, 1983; Purvanova & Bono, 2009). Yet, it is agreed on that an increase in transformational leadership in a virtual team leads to improved team performance (Purvanova & Bono, 2009). However, in virtual work environments where face-to-face interaction is not existent, the role of a leader and the requirements on this position become even more decisive (Avolio et al., 2001). In order to briefly outline the relevance of transformational leadership theory for virtual environments, the four dimensions of transformational leadership will be reflected from a virtual perspective.

An *Idealized Influence* implies elements such as loyalty, a high commitment to ideals and the pursuit of a shared mission (Purvanova & Bono, 2009). Literature shows, that especially in times characterized by uncertainty and a lack of trust, successfully implemented transformational leadership can increase the efficiency of a team (Sedrine et al., 2021).

(Shamir and Howell (1999) stated in their research that leaders operating in uncertain contexts are more likely to influence employees values and ideals and set collective goals (Shamir & Howell, 1999; Waldman & Yammarino, 1999). It can therefore be concluded that effective transformational leadership can be even more significant and relevant in a virtual environment and that the influence of a transformational leader can lead to beneficial outcomes for the organization.

One of the most important aims of transformational leadership lies in the creation of *inspirational motivation* and the communication of a vision to increase the team performance, which is naturally supported by verbal and non-verbal communication in face-to-face interactions (Bass, 1999; Zigurs, 2003). Furthermore, leaders are the most inspirational, when they transmit feelings, emotions and enthusiasm for the future (Purvanova & Bono, 2009). A virtual environment most likely creates the challenge to communicate this vision effectively to a dispersed team and to transmit those feelings and emotions without a personal interaction. Past research already emphasized the importance of continuous leadership communication in virtual work environments in order to increase cohesion and motivation, which eventually leads to a more successful team performance (Purvanova & Bono, 2009).

Leaders perform *intellectual stimulation* when they encourage employees to rethink common practices and question assumptions (Purvanova & Bono, 2009b). In this regard, the literature particularly addresses the complexity of virtual communication. Compared to face-to-face interaction, virtual communication is described as more confusing and cognitively demanding (Purvanova & Bono, 2009b; Thompson & Coovert, 2003). Therefore, leaders may find it harder to prioritize intellectual stimulation and include employees in the decision-making process, as it is way more time consuming compared to face-to-face interaction (Purvanova & Bono, 2009). This suggests that the importance of effective intellectual stimulation is even greater in a virtual work environment.

This also applies to the dimension of *individualized consideration*, which focuses on the skill of a leader to recognize the individual needs and abilities of employees (Purvanova & Bono, 2009). In order to do so, the establishment of close relationships is of great importance (Purvanova & Bono, 2009). If the social communicative exchange is replaced by task-

oriented exchange, which is performed less frequently in order to save time, individualized consideration behaviors may suffer (Purvanova & Bono, 2009).

It emerges from the literature that communication in transformational leadership has significant effects in numerous areas associated with the topic of change. Poorly managed organizational change not only uses up time and financial costs but also negatively influences employee morale and commitment, leading to diminished work effectiveness and an increase in turnover rates (Chawla & Kevin Kelloway, 2004; Eby et al., 2000; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979). The literature already underlines the role of supportive employee behavior for the seamless integration of change (Agote et al., 2016; Faupel & Süß, 2019). Nevertheless, the implementation of change is also highly dependent on the role of the leader (Pawar & Eastman, 1997). Study findings reveal that a leader's behavior or leadership style can change the employees` response to change, with the most important key function being effective communication (Oreg & Berson, 2019). This can be carried out for instance through championing behavior or sense giving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Islam et al., 2021). Moreover, findings from Yue et al. (2019) demonstrate, that transparent communication in transformational leadership is positively affecting organizational trust among employees, which consequently increases the receptivity of employees towards change.

In the context of change in the sense of increasing virtuality in the work environment, research results about the effects of transformational leadership in virtual environments differ. Hoch and Kozlowski (2014) tested the influence of transformational leadership on performance depending on the extent of virtuality within the team and found that teams with higher virtuality were less impacted by transformational leadership. Contrary to these findings, are study results from Purvanova and Bono (2009). The researchers compared transformational leaders from virtual and face-to-face teams and found that transformational leadership behaviors carry greater significance in teams, where communication processes are determined by technology. Nevertheless, Hoch and Kozlowski found that structural supports such as communication and providing relevant information have a more substantial effect on performance in virtual teams (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Moreover, a transformational leadership style that embraces trust and operational cohesion

influences the social dynamic in a virtual team and resulting the team performance (Sedrine et al., 2021).

2.2.2 Leadership Communication in a Virtual Environment

As discussed in the theoretical framework of modern work models, the digital transformation process and new technologies have not only facilitated new ways of working, but also enabled new possibilities for collaboration and communicative exchange (Bresciani et al., 2021; Gilson et al., 2021). This is also reflected in research about virtual teams, that has mainly focused on the differences in communication between traditional and virtual teams (Marlow et al., 2017). It is even said that virtual communication today is as important as traditional face-to-face communication (Liu et al., 2018). Nevertheless, virtual leadership creates new framework conditions for communicative exchange. Virtual teams are likely to be composed with members who do not necessarily share the same norms, backgrounds or procedures for performing their work (Huang et al., 2010). Moreover, employees may be situated in diverse locations, time zones, and cultural contexts. The geographical dispersion of employees particularly underscores the necessity for nonverbal communication possibilities (Andres, 2012; Kahai et al., 2012; Kayworth & Leidner, 2002).

This underscores one of the key characteristics of virtual leadership, which is that communication takes place primarily through virtual tools (Liu et al., 2018). Information and communication technologies commonly utilized within the virtual leadership context are for instance e-mail, texting, social media, video presentations, videoconferencing, internets and intranets, document sharing and blogs (Liu et al., 2018). Especially videoconferencing technology has made extensive improvements since 2015 and now represents a reliable and easy-to-use tool (Liu et al., 2018). Moreover, it facilitates verbal communication and enables face-to-face exchanges, which contributed to personalizing the virtual work environment. Significant advancements also became apparent in the field of document sharing. Modern document sharing platforms such as Google Docs enable real-time editing and automatic documentation, which makes the use of parallel e-mail attachments for document sharing obsolete (Liu et al., 2018).

While certain information and communication technologies, such as e-mail and intranet, remain relatively stable, other technologies such as social media still evolve rapidly (Liu et

al., 2018). This in turn demands greater technological competence, an increased demand for technology integration through organizational information platforms and the establishment of new norms for information and communication technologies (Liu et al., 2018). Furthermore, these developments highlight that technology-related skills can be seen as one of the core competencies that a successful and effective leader needs to own (Liu et al., 2018).

An important task for virtual leaders is therefore to carefully select suitable technologies for their purposes and make critical choices about which technologies are the most effective (Liu et al., 2018). It crucial for leaders to comprehend the advantages and features of different types of information and communication technologies and to correctly assess how those technologies interact with the task environment of a leader (Liu et al., 2018). A text message is by far too informal for the announcement of new directives but when a room change occurs 20 minutes before a meeting starts, an e-mail will most likely be the less effective choice (Liu et al., 2018). Teleconferencing is a suitable tool for problem solving, document-sharing is a supportive tool for collective planning and an e-mail with attachments is the better option for virtually communicating a directive (Liu et al., 2018). This emphasizes the significance of awareness regarding the choice of information and communication technologies. However, virtual leadership communication extends beyond the technological aspect. Social aspects such as encompassing emotions and feelings, and meeting employees' communication preferences for speed, personalized experiences, reminders, etc., must also be incorporated into virtual leadership communication strategies (Liu et al., 2018). Effective virtual leaders therefore not only have to possess technology-related skills but also constantly look out for adoption needs through investigating, testing, implementing, or refining new technology usage (Liu et al., 2018).

Virtual communication in teams is influenced by various factors and phases that are reflected in research literature (Abarca et al., 2020). One of the most recent phases of influence is the COVID-19 pandemic that has forced the broad workforce out of various sectors to carry out their work remotely (Velicia-Martin et al., 2021). Research supports the opinion that, although there might be shared traits between employees that have been transitioning to virtual work due to the pandemic and the ones who were working remotely before, post-COVID19 virtual work and the rise of hybrid models require different leadership practices

and a different focus (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Feitosa & Salas, 2021). Prior to the pandemic, virtual work was a strategic choice by the organizations, motivated by the aim to access globally dispersed talent, foster collaborations irrespective of geographical and temporal constraints, and enhance organizational flexibility and adaptability (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). With the start of the pandemic, organizational structures were radically transformed, and the workforce was forced to transition into a virtual work environment (Ancona et al., 2021; Gersick, 1991). Virtual work was therefore not a matter of choice but became an imperative for organizational survival (Richter, 2020). Regardless of whether leaders had to operate virtually beginning from the pandemic or earlier, the unique characteristics of a virtual environment bring along a number of challenges for e-leaders (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Kerber & Buono, 2004). It is therefore interesting to look at how the challenges of virtual leadership communication as identified in the literature have developed over time and which potential focal points have been relevant across various phases up to now.

Looking at the challenges of virtual leadership that were addressed in the literature prior to the pandemic, the focus was primarily on challenges relating to the quality of communication, technical issues, and the productivity of working from home. Literature stated, that if communication is performed entirely virtual, misunderstandings, delays in information or simply less frequent communication between the leader and the employees can occur (Andres, 2012). This can in turn lead to a general reduction in cooperation within the team and diminishes levels of engagement and alignment with the common goals and objectives of the organization (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Research also questioned the productivity gains of virtual teams, as employees are not in the same physical place (Huang et al., 2010). Furthermore, the use of information and communication technology is likely to pose challenges for employees to coordinate their work, get and stay motivated, build commitment towards their team and organization and develop trust relationships (Huang et al., 2010).

The swift transition to the virtual format caused by the COVID-19 pandemic came with new workplace stressors (Luebstorf et al., 2023). Here, tendencies can be recognized in research published during that time. Research findings reveal that work-home interface, communication issues and a lack of technological foundations represented key challenges

after the sudden shift to remote work (Luebstorf et al., 2023). As the change in work evolved rapidly, employees often had to rely on their own personal computing devices and share their workspaces with spouses, children or flat mates, which added additional tensions to the work environment (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). Another challenge that came along with meeting solutions such as Zoom, MS Teams or Google Meet (Luebstorf et al., 2023). The so-called phenomenon of "Zoom fatigue", which was experienced by a broad workforce, describes the exhaustion that arises out of the extent of participating in videoconferencing (Bennett et al., 2021). McKinsey & Company and Deloitte reports have clearly delineated the challenges traditional leaders face when navigating the transition to e-leadership amidst these stressors. These challenges include the promotion of new e-leadership styles, effective management of work-life boundaries, and prioritizing the well-being of virtual team members (Comella-Dorda et al., 2020; Deloitte, 2020). In contrast to pre-pandemic challenges that centered around technological issues and personnel control, it is evident that the challenges during the pandemic evolved towards a more employee-centric direction, prioritizing the well-being of the workforce.

To date, there are still very few studies that consider the development of virtual leadership communication after the pandemic and address challenges that exist or have already been overcome. Challenges that are still mentioned as consistent in the recent literature are the factors of social isolation, work-life balance or the "always-on" culture (Chafi et al., 2021). This is closely connected to results about leadership in the post pandemic medical sector which suggest that the rising numbers of hybrid work arrangements come with challenges of protecting the well-being and mental health of employees (Oleksa-Marewska & Tokar, 2022). This requires leaders to focus on creating a shared vision, defining clear goals and strategies and managing consistency through communicativeness (Oleksa-Marewska & Tokar, 2022). Moreover, the challenges of virtual meetings were predicted to remain relevant in the future, as remote work or modified forms of it such as hybrid work will be part of the future work design (Alexander et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the above-mentioned new framework conditions of virtual leadership communication place new demands on leaders to communicate effectively with their employees. Due to the rising virtuality, leaders are facing the challenge to place a stronger focus on individual needs as well as personal and technological determinants. The

next chapter therefore considers practices that contribute to effective leadership communication in a virtual work environment.

2.2.3 Six Practices for Effective Leadership Communication

The previous chapters have already illustrated why effective leadership communication is of great importance in an organizational environment. However, virtuality poses new challenges for this type of communication. This is highlighted in the fact that communication processes and tools effective in face-to-face interactions may not be directly applicable or lead to similar outcomes in the context of virtual communication for virtual teams (Daim et al., 2012; Kahai et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2018). It is therefore important to consider which factors are decisive for leadership communication effectiveness in a virtual environment.

Table 1

Six Practices of Effective Leadership Communication

Practice	Explanation
Communication Responsiveness	Support through timely responses as a sign of attention and respect towards employees.
Communication Frequency	Frequent communication in order to build strong relationships and increase exchange between employees.
Communication Predictability	Signaling employees that their problems are being taken seriously by providing thoughtful and detailed responses.
Communication Clarity	Communicate directions and expectations clearly for employees to use effectively.
Communication Mode	Selection of the right mode and corresponding technology for the respective communicative purpose.
Double-Check of Technology	Reviewing and adapting technologies in order to guarantee their ongoing suitability.

Note: According to Newman and Ford (2021)

Newman and Ford (2021) listed six communication practices that must be adapted in interaction with virtual employees: communication responsiveness, communication

frequency, communication predictability, clarity of communication, communication mode and the double-check of technology used.

The first focal point of Newman and Ford (2021) contains the communication *responsiveness* of a leader, which is mentioned by the authors as a particularly important aspect in virtual environments. Research findings show that employees expect their calls to be responded within 24 hours and their messages even quicker. Study results of Kayworth and Leidner (2002) confirm the relevance of this viewpoint, as employees who felt that their leaders did not respond to their questions and requirements promptly, voiced complaints. Besides providing the employee with necessary information, a leader's timely response is also a sign of respect and attention towards a distant employee and makes the respective person feel seen and supported (Newman & Ford, 2021).

Bass (1990) already stated that the most effective leaders engage in frequent communication and interaction with their employees. Empirical evidence supports this proposition, as research findings indicate that frequent communication, regardless of a formal or informal approach, contributes to an increased team effectiveness and ultimately enhances the overall organizational performance (Newman et al., 2020; Patrashkova-Volzdoska et al., 2003). Furthermore, frequent communication fosters the development of strong relationships between leaders and virtual employees and additionally has the potential to increase the amount of communication among employees (Newman & Ford, 2021). Research findings from Kayworth and Leidner (2002) underscore the importance of providing continuous feedback and suggestions regarding team matters, which represents an important mediator regarding employee satisfaction.

Third, the *predictability* of leader communication represents an important practice. Leaders communicate predictably by providing detailed and thoughtful responses and avoid giving employees the feeling of being upset with their question or not finding their communication and concerns important (Newman & Ford, 2021). Being unpredictable can cause employees to read unintended messages out of a leader's communication, which negatively impacts the trust relationship between a leader and their employees as well as changes the employee's perspective on the organizational culture and the leader's trustworthiness (Newman & Ford, 2021). In turn, predictable responses to inquiries or tasks can positively impact the

employees' organizational commitment and eventually the team performance (Newman & Ford, 2021).

The fourth communication technique that Newman and Ford recommend leaders to attend to is *communication clarity*. When leaders are giving direction or feedback the communication needs to be understood by the receiver in order to be used effectively and to be accepted (Newman & Ford, 2021). An additional aspect that was highlighted by Kayworth and Leidner (2002) in this regard is the providing of a clear and detailed picture of task by the leader, which is closely connected to communication clarity. Employees cannot carry out what they don't understand so task related communication and the associated directions and expectations as set by the leader have to be communicated clearly and understandable (Newman & Ford, 2021). This can be carried out by a leader through clearly articulated task assignments, measurable goals, specific roles, and deadlines, which eventually positively affect the overall team performance (Newman & Ford, 2021).

The last two practices contain the careful selection of the communication mode as well as the double-check of the technology used. The previous chapter has already emphasized how important it is to select the right mode and the corresponding technology for the communicative purpose so that communication processes can be carried out smoothly and without barriers. This includes for a leader to thoughtfully select when to use an e-mail instead of a phone call or instant messaging instead of a videoconference (Newman & Ford, 2021). Thereby, it is also relevant to individually consider each recipient depending on the preferred communication mode (Newman & Ford, 2021). In some cases, it may even be useful to use several models simultaneously, for example if a sense of urgency has to be transmitted (Newman & Ford, 2021). In order for this practice to succeed in the long term due to the constantly evolving technologies, permanent awareness by the leader must be ensured, reviewing and adapting the technologies for their suitability (Liu et al., 2018).

The communication practices put forward by Newman and Ford (2021) highlight how crucial it is for a leader to be accessible, responsive, and transparent towards his employees, combined with a sophisticated selection of communication modes and the corresponding technologies. Moreover, they highlight that virtual work is becoming more prevalent and leaders need to adapt their communication strategies to address these challenges and ensure cohesive and successful team dynamics. Successfully implementing those practices not only

enhances team effectiveness and relationships but also contributes to organizational commitment and performance.

2.2.4 Perceived Leadership Communication in Contemporary Work Environments

As can be derived from the previous chapters, the concept of remote and hybrid work models has significantly modified the dynamics of organizational communication, with a particular emphasis on leadership communication. As traditional office structures evolve, understanding how leadership communication is perceived in these new environments becomes fundamental. Therefore, the following chapter provides a brief overview of theory as well as the existing body of research concerning perceived leadership communication in contemporary work environments.

From the literature to date, the importance of examining perceptions of leadership communication has become undeniably apparent. Jacobsen and Andersen (2015) made a valuable contribution to underlining the relevance of perceived leadership with their finding that employee-perceived leadership has a stronger correlation with organizational performance than leader-intended leadership and that leadership therefore depends more on perceptions than on intentions. While the perceptions of leadership have proven to be crucial for organizational success, this significance of effective leadership communication in general extends even further in the context of virtual and hybrid work environments. Literature has already shown that effective leadership communication is fundamental to working in work models that imply a virtual environment. According to Cakula and Pratt (2021) the motivation level of employees, the climate of effective communication in the organization and the support offered by the leader are mandatory pillars to successfully perform remote work. If the necessary technological foundations are in place and accessible to the employees, it is essential for the successful implementation of remote work that leaders take on a motivating role and accompany the adaptation process through guidance (Cakula & Pratt, 2021). However, comparatively few studies to date have specifically addressed different work models in connection to perceived leadership communication, connecting employee perceptions of employees and assessments of leaders.

With their study about leader communication effectiveness between leader and follower in a remote work environment, Neufeld et al. (2010) have provided an important approach in

this regard. A survey of 138 employees across 41 leaders found that communication effectiveness is a strong predictor of perceived leader performance in a virtual work environment. Another significant approach was put forward by Newman et al. (2020) who conducted a study about leader communication effectiveness in a virtual environment as perceived by employees. The authors examined the effects of effective leader communication on team performance outcomes and analyzed 458 responses from 68 teams. The results, indicating a positive correlation between the effective use of communication and employees' perception of their own team performance, along with the identification of alignment issues between employee perceptions and leader perceptions of effective communication, offer valuable insights for organizations and their overall performance. Although the focus of these studies was placed solely on virtual work and didn't include other specific work environments, these results form a strong basis for this thesis' research interest, as the link between effective communication and perceived leader performance was established and the virtuality of work models was considered. Moreover, the findings clearly illustrate that there are still discrepancies between leadership communication perceived as effective and leadership communication actually carried out. This underscores the necessity to delve deeper into employee perceptions of leadership communication, exploring potential focal points that have not yet been thoroughly examined in the literature.

A study by Newman, Ford, and Marshall (2020) took a more detailed perspective in this regard, creating a significant foundation for this work. The researchers took a closer look on how the perception of virtual team members regarding their leader's effective use of communication tools and strategies eventually affects the outcomes of their teams' performance. Twelve statements were provided about the nature of communication on the part of the leader for employees to rate on a scale of 1 to 7. Through the examination of 458 responses from 68 teams, a positive correlation between virtual team members' perceptions of their leaders' effective communication and the overall performance of their teams emerged. Another discovery was the significant impact of trust on the leader-team relationship, consequently influencing performance outcomes. In their study, Newman et al. (2020) offer valuable insights into how employees perceive leader communication. However, employees currently have the chance to evaluate only specific and restricted facets of leadership communication, without connecting their perception of effective leadership communication to the actual communication processes. Furthermore, Newman et al.(2020)

concentrated exclusively on team effectiveness. Therefore, exploring how individual employees assess communicative interactions would be a valuable approach for future research.

Similar to the approach taken in this paper, a recently published study by Mikkelson et al. (2023) is the first to examine leader communication competence in the context of employee perceptions in remote, hybrid and onsite work environments. The results showed that there were no differences in perceived leadership communication effectiveness in the various work models. Nevertheless, the researchers did not portray a detailed view on communication effectiveness as well as communicative leadership behavior, which would allow more detailed insights into the specific aspects that would influence these perceptions. Furthermore, individual nuances of supervisor communication were not considered, which lead to the fact that relevant leadership skills from the perspective of employees could not be identified.

While previous studies provide revealing approaches and insights into the relationship between contemporary work models and perceived leadership communication there is a limited understanding of how communication practices vary in traditional office, remote, and hybrid work models and how these variations influence perceived leadership communication effectiveness. Research so far does not consider detailed insights such as focal points and challenges as perceived by employees in different work models. Therefore, a more comprehensive exploration of employees' perspectives and evaluations needs to be undertaken, allowing more detailed insights into the specific aspects contributing to effective on-site, remote, and hybrid leadership communication, as well as differences in perceptions between the work models. This thesis seeks to fill that gap by offering a detailed exploration of leadership communication from the employee's perspective across these different work models and enhancing the insights by incorporating leader perspectives.

Chapter 3 – Industry Perspectives on Leadership Communication: The Luxury and Chemical Industry in Germany

The following chapter explains the chosen focus of this thesis on the luxury industry as well as the chemical industry as a benchmark, explaining the reasons for selecting these particular sectors for further investigation. By examining the unique characteristics and dynamics of the luxury goods industry and the chemical industry, insights into the structural differences between the industries are highlighted, providing a basis for the interpretation and the possibility of generalizing the empirical results.

3.1 The Luxury Industry at a Glance

The luxury industry is commonly named synonymous with notions such as exclusivity, craftsmanship, and innovation (Faccioli et al., 2023). According to the Global Powers of Luxury Goods Report (2023) the world's top 100 companies in the luxury sector are more profitable than ever. While the top ten companies in the luxury sector contributed 56% of the luxury goods sales, LVMH leads the top ten sales in 2022 with a contribution of 31%, followed by Kering and Richemont. The industry comprises product sectors such as Clothing and Footwear, Bags and Accessories, Beauty, Jewelry and Watches as well as multiple luxury goods (Faccioli et al., 2023). LVMH and its primary business group of fashion and leather goods contributed more than two thirds of the overall company luxury revenue, gained through the leading luxury brands Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, Céline, Fendi, Loro Piana, Loewe and Marc Jacobs (Faccioli et al., 2023). Louis Vuitton thereby represents the world's largest luxury brand with a first-time revenue of 20 billion euros in 2022 (Faccioli et al., 2023). Alongside the above-mentioned companies, the top of the luxury industry consists of numerous other well-known companies such as The Estée Lauder Companies Inc., Chanel Limited, L'Oréal Luxe, Hermès International SCA, Rolex SA and PVH Corp. (Faccioli et al., 2023).

While one would assume that after a momentous period like the pandemic, when everyday goods were in short supply and people were living in fear, luxury goods would not mark a priority, the figures for recent years indicate the opposite. According to the Global Powers of Luxury Goods Report (Faccioli et al., 2023) the luxury industry has recorded a sharp increase in luxury goods sales in all sectors following the pandemic, which not only signals a flourishing market situation but also marks a record-high compared to the previous years.

This effect is also apparent in the German market. In their article on the luxury boom in times of uncertain events, Bomke et al. (2022) describe the resilience of the luxury sector despite the numerous crises of recent years. The authors highlight that the rising energy and food prices lead to an adjustment in consumer spending habits, with less spendings on food, energy, and leisure activities. Nevertheless, despite these economic challenges, the luxury goods market in Germany remains strong, showing resilience to issues like geopolitical tensions, inflation, and the energy crisis while continuing to record steady growth and high sales. In 2022, luxury sales in Germany reached €330 billion, which marks an increase of almost 15% compared to the previous year. Even the COVID-19 pandemic only represented a slight downturn for the industry in 2020, followed by a quick recovery in 2021, surpassing pre-pandemic levels with sales of €288 billion. Predictions from a study on the global luxury goods market also predict continued growth in the coming years (D'Arpizio & Levato, 2023). The global market volume is expected to rise to 570 billion euros by 2030, which represents a doubling compared to 2020 (D'Arpizio & Levato, 2023).

3.2 Relevance of the Luxury Industry to Leadership Communication in Contemporary Work Environments

While there is a shortage of literature on hybrid and remote working with regard to leadership communication in the luxury sector, the impact of the pandemic as well as the characteristics of the luxury industry highlight the importance of flexible work models and effective leadership communication for the industry.

The global pandemic impacted various industries on a global level and the luxury industry was not exception. Covid has shaken some of the fundamental building blocks of the luxury industry, such as the action possibilities of the global consumer, relationships with customers and trade partners, and the distribution network including the wholesale sector (Achille & Zipser, 2020). Nevertheless, crises can pave the way for new approaches. As a result, new focal points such as the digitalization of the end-to-end supply chain, technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, the Internet of Things and the establishment of remote working platforms have come to the foreground (Achille & Zipser, 2020; Faccioli et al., 2023). Since the pandemic, sales in the international luxury goods sector have not only developed strongly but are also expected to grow in the upcoming years (Bomke et al., 2022;

D'Arpizio & Levato, 2023). Moreover, the increase of e-commerce and digital platforms leads to boundaries being overcome, reshaping the concepts of exclusivity and accessibility for consumers worldwide (Triveshika & Sukanya, 2024). This also results in an increasing globalization of the industry, which makes it more and more crucial to promptly identify and adjust to the diverse preferences and needs of both established and emerging markets (Jensen, 2017). This calls for organizational capabilities like a flexible and responsive network (Jensen, 2017). Moreover, the multicultural and interconnected nature of modern business environments emphasizes the importance of knowledge-sharing and collaboration between business and design teams worldwide (Jensen, 2017). For these purposes, hybrid and remote work models are of great importance, which is also reflected in the characteristics described above, such as flexibility or the networking of employees across different space and time zones.

Luke Anton, Global Head of Collaborations, Content and Marketing at Penfolds and Executive Brand Strategy consultant for LVMH, emphasizes on the one hand the challenges that remote work contains, particularly for creative processes such as design and content creation for luxury brands. [10] Anton states that "Creating content and visuals for multiple segments of brands and clients (…) without physically being together is quite challenging, and organically leads to a new style of autonomous material development. While there's a constant dialogue via video, email and text, it's definitely more time consuming for everyone to be in agreement with a final edit, than it is to produce similar content in person.". [11] On the other hand, he highlights the necessity of virtual work models for a globally acting industry, stating that "The luxury fashion and creative industries are global, and so are many of its clients (…). The global pandemic of 2020 highlighted where professional culture hadn't but should have moved towards a long time ago. Flexible and remote working isn't just an option anymore, it's a workplace norm". This statement emphasizes that virtual work opportunities are fundamental to the luxury industry and should be a matter of course, especially given the global nature of the industry. Furthermore, it supportively underlines the approach of this to consider different work models in an industry context, which has only been done to a very limited extent in current research.

[10] Retrieved from: https://whereby.com/blog/remote-working-in-the-luxury-fashion-industry/ (29.09.2024)
[11] Retrieved from: https://whereby.com/blog/remote-working-in-the-luxury-fashion-industry/ (29.09.2024)

In order to successfully implement the focal points highlighted above, virtual work within the luxury industry demands leadership that supports and empowers the integration of both global and local expertise, enhancing the development and delivery of innovative products and services on a global scale (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017). To drive innovation seamlessly from idea to market, luxury companies must prioritize enhanced organizational collaboration, connecting diverse global and local insights, and cultivating a collective culture of innovation (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017). When asked on how to enable employees to function in a virtual work surrounding as a leader, Anton emphasizes the importance of moderating the virtual work process. “Discipline, kindness, patience, and making sure that all voices in the (virtual) room are heard. It’s an evolving process to understand individuals` favored working styles and preferences.”, he states. This highlights the importance of leadership communication in regard to virtual work environments.

Leadership and it’s communicative facet thereby has been examined across diverse sectors including, among others, industrial (Flin, 2004; Porter, 1981), construction (Skeepers & Mbohwa, 2015; Spatz, 1999), hospitality (Hinkin & Tracey, 1994; Rabiul et al., 2023), tourism (Ladkin & Weber, 2011; Ntalakos et al., 2022), insurance (Madlock, 2018; Raina & Roebuck, 2016) and oil and gas industries (Crichton, 2005; Naji et al., 2022). Although the concept of transformational leadership in particular has been assessed in numerous studies in connection with the hospitality sector (Aftab et al., 2023; Belias et al., 2022; Hinkin & Tracey, 1994), it has not found general application across the luxury industry. Moreover, the concept of leadership communication in hybrid and remote work environments has not been considered in regard to any industry at to date.

3.3 The Chemical Sector as a Benchmark for Investigation

In order to provide a comparative benchmark towards the luxury industry, the chemical sector in Germany was chosen as a structural contrast. The following chapter outlines the structural differences between the selected industries and thus explains the rationale behind the selection.

To obtain a general overview over the chemical industry in Germany, the most recent industry portrait provides valuable insights into the state of the industry and its role in the German market (Büchel et al., 2022). The chemical industry in Germany represents an

essential and one of the largest parts of the German industry, being the third largest industrial sector after vehicle construction and mechanical engineering (Branchenskizze, 2021). There are around 2,100 chemical and pharmaceutical companies in Germany, which currently employ around 466,500 people. Of the German chemical companies, 92 per cent are small and medium-sized enterprises with fewer than 500 employees (Branchenskizze, 2021). In general, the chemical industry can be described broad, with more than 25 segments serving multiple end industries (Klei et al., 2021). Furthermore, the sector is a driver of innovation from which all customers along the subsequent parts of the value chain benefit. The industry also pays above-average wages, from which high social security contributions and taxes are paid, which contribute to the stability of social security and public finances. When looking at the overall economic importance of the industry, it must be taken into account that the chemical industry is at the beginning of the value chain and is therefore an important supplier for many other industries, which results in a strong vertical network across Europe. The overall employment level of the chemical industry in Germany thus amounts to 787,461 jobs or around 1.7 percent of the workforce in Germany. The sector is thus the sixth largest employer in Germany and has recorded rising employment figures over the last 10 years (Branchenporträt, 2023).

A comparison of the chemical industry with the luxury industry reveals a number of structural differences. The first difference consists in the core business models of the industries. The chemical industry focuses primarily on the production of chemical substances, raw materials and intermediate products that are used in various industries such as the automotive, construction and electronics industries. The focus lies on transforming natural resources into formulated products and materials, substituting other materials such as glass, stones, metals, ceramics, paper, rubber, natural textiles or leather or enabling new solutions such as new forms of mobility or zero-energy housing (Business Transformation in the Chemical Industry, 2019). Pricing in the chemical industry often relies on factors such as production costs, supply and demand, and competitive factors. On the other hand, the luxury industry includes products that are often considered prestige items, such as high-quality clothing, jewellery, watches, cosmetics and luxury goods (Faccioli et al., 2023). These items are often perceived as status symbols and are targeting private customers, commanding higher prices that are based on the factors of design, exclusitivity, craftsmanship (Fionda & Moore, 2009).

Another factor that structurally distinguishes the industries from one another is the construction of the value chain. The chemical industry is mainly a producer of intermediate goods with only 27 percent of chemical products, such as coatings, paints, adhesives, fertilizers and personal care products, being sold directly to the end consumer (Branchenskizze, 2021). Around two thirds are further processed within the industry and sold to customers such as plastics processors, mechanical engineering, the automotive industry, packaging, construction and textile industries (Branchenskizze, 2021). The remainder goes to service providers or for commercial use (Branchenskizze, 2021). In contrast, the value chain in the luxury industry can be strongly characterized by craftsmanship, distinctiveness, and brand image, resulting in a higher degree of exclusivity and personalization (Fionda & Moore, 2009). The brands often employ a selective distribution network, including exclusive retail stores, luxury boutiques, and sometimes company-owned flagship stores. Moreover, products in the luxury sector are produced by manufacturers or even the brand owners and are sold directly to the end customer or through a retailer (Zhang et al., 2020). Additionally, products in the luxury industry are closely connected to perceived quality and the personal value that are ascribed to the respective products (Butcher et al., 2016).

This aspect is closely connected to the structural difference of communication and marketing needs and in general the importance of communication in the two industries. In the chemical industry, the emphasis often lies on technical expertise, quality assurance, and customer service. Marketing measures tend to play a subordinate role in the industry, as sales are not made to the end customer. In comparison, brand image, heritage, and marketing play a central role for the luxury industry. The multifaceted desires of consumers and the subjective perceptions of luxury value make marketing activities indispensable (Hennigs et al., 2015). Furthermore, communication is necessary to bring end consumers into the stores and to the retailers where the products are primarily sold. From this it can be derived that communication in the luxury industry is of greater importance compared to the chemical industry, which allows the assumption that not only communication actions receive more attention, but also that higher expectations are placed on communicative processes within the organization, including the communicative exchanges between leaders and their employees. This is reflected in employee requirements in the luxury sector, where strong communication and interpersonal skills are seen as a key competency, regardless of working

in sales, marketing or management departments.[12] Contrary to that, regarding the future development of the chemical industry, report findings highlight that skills in marketing and communication need to be advanced and further developed to take on a greater role in the future (Ogrinz et al., 2023).

Another important aspect consists in the market dynamics, where further differences become apparent. The chemical industry is often heavily dependent on industrial applications and global economic trends. It is also subject to strict regulatory requirements and fluctuations in the price of raw materials. The luxury industry, on the other hand, is strongly influenced by trends, seasonal fluctuations, consumer behavior and brand image. This can be illustrated by reviewing the market development in recent years. Findings of the Global Powers of Luxury Goods Report show a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 12.8% between 2019 and 2022 for the 10 biggest companies in the luxury industry (Faccioli et al., 2023). In around the same period from 2020 to 2025, including an estimated assumption for the year 2025, a compound annual growth rate of 4.3 per cent is predicted for the chemical industry. This shows that the luxury industry would have grown more than four times as fast as the chemical industry in recent years.

Another structural difference becomes apparent in the age structure of the respective industries. In order to emphasize and illustrate the difference in this regard, data of the two leading companies in the two sectors, LVMH for the luxury sector and BASF for the chemical sector, are presented. In the following tables 3 and 4, an overview of the age structures is provided.

[12] Retrieved from: https://www.hr.com/en/resources/wikis/7-skills-you-need-to-have-to-get-into-the-luxury-i_lfk07wo5.html (11.03.2023)

Table 2

LVMH Age Distribution

In %	Global workforce
-25	10.7
25-29	18.3
30-34	20.3
35-39	16.3
40-44	11.8
45-49	8.7
50-54	6.6
55-59	4.7
60 and up	2.7

Note: Retrieved from the LVMH annual report (2023)

Table 3 highlights, that a majority of employees in the luxury sector is located in the age ranges of 25 to 29 and 30 to 34 years. The next largest categories consist of the age groups between 35 and 39 years, younger than 25 years, and between 40 and 44 years. Only a relatively small proportion of employees are aged 50 or older, while the proportion of employees above the age of 60 lies at just 2.7%. These figures clearly demonstrate that the company has a rather young age structure.

Table 3

BASF Age Distribution

In years	Global workforce
-25	8.223
26-39	39.960
40-54	41.892
55 and up	21.916

Note: Retrieved from the BASF annual report (2023)

The chemical industry represents a contrasting structure in this regard. Table 3 illustrates that the largest proportion of employees are aged between 40 and 55 years and older, which represents a significantly higher age structure compared to the luxury industry. Study findings show that age is an important and moderating factor when it comes to the adjustment to virtual work (Raghuram, 2001). This means that virtual work adjustment such as clarity of evaluation criteria, trust and organizational connectedness is higher and easier to realize for younger employees (Raghuram, 2001). The age difference in the two industries could therefore be a decisive factor when it comes to the implementation of virtual working and leadership communication in this regard.

Another topical difference is the extent to which and how severely the two industries were affected by the coronavirus pandemic. While the luxury industry, as noted above, emerged relatively unscathed from the crises of recent years, the chemical industry has had to face several challenges. Factors such as location conditions and electricity prices in Germany have deteriorated over time, resulting in less profitable investment by the chemical industry than in the manufacturing sector as a whole (Büchel et al., 2022). Moreover, geopolitical tensions, sustainability, and advanced analytics brought along change in established ways of value-creation (Klei et al., 2021). Despite a slight recovery during the transformation processes towards digitalisation and the circular economy, the capital stock in the chemical industry has been decreasing slowly but persistently since the mid-2000s (Büchel et al., 2022). In comparison, even though the leading companies in the luxury industry were financially affected to a very limited extent by the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry in general had to deal with other impacts such as struggling wholesalers due to rising e-commerce figures, international sales hindered by travel restrictions or lost connections to consumers due to fashion weeks and trade shows not taking place (Achille & Zipser, 2020). This illustrates once more that the luxury industry depends to a large extent on in-store purchases and the brand experience, and that events and trade shows play an essential and fundamental role. As mentioned above, this in turn creates different prerequisites for product sales, emotional value and the role of communication in the industry in general.

Given the various micro-influences and market influences that have been identified, it can be assumed that the structural differences in the industries and in particular the role of communication also represent different preconditions for organizations, leadership, and

virtual working. This speaks in favor of selecting the chemical industry as a counterpart to the luxury industry in order to cover the broadest possible range of assessments of leadership communication in virtual environments.

3.4 Research Gap and Methodological Considerations

From the existing literature, it becomes evident that perceived leadership communication in remote, hybrid, or on-site work environments has not yet been investigated in relation to a specific industry, thus indicating a research gap in this area. Considering the factors individually, it becomes apparent that only a few studies have addressed the topic of perceived leadership communication (Peng et al., 2022; Quintana et al., 2015), with the luxury industry focusing more on brand leadership and marketing communication strategies instead (Beverland & Luxton, 2005; Chang et al., 2016). Moreover, the connection with virtual work models is only sporadically made, whereas research tends focus more on virtual solutions for external marketing and communication strategies, as well as the end-to-end supply chain, rather than internal communication processes between leaders and employees, which represents another noticeable research gap (Achille & Zipser, 2020; Kapferer, 2014; Ornati & Kalbaska, 2022).

In the chemical industry, as well, there are currently no studies addressing perceived leadership communication in contemporary work environments. However, compared to the luxury industry, perceived leadership communication has received sporadic attention in this domain (Amabile et al., 2004b; Fernando & Wulansari, 2021). Furthermore, while there are occasional studies examining leadership communication within the context of the chemical industry, it is often considered a subordinate factor in the context of leadership strategies or other overarching topics such as workplace safety (Bazzoli et al., 2020; Shafique et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2021). Regarding the topic of hybrid and remote work in the chemical industry, a greater research history exists compared to the luxury industry, yet it has been comparatively underexplored so far (Biriowu, 2023; Lund et al., 2020; Shimura et al., 2021). A greater emphasis in this area of research lies on virtuality in terms of machine learning and virtual reality (Kumar et al., 2021; Pirker & Dengel, 2021).

Summarizing the previous subchapters, it becomes apparent that perceived leadership communication in different work environments in connection with the industry represents a

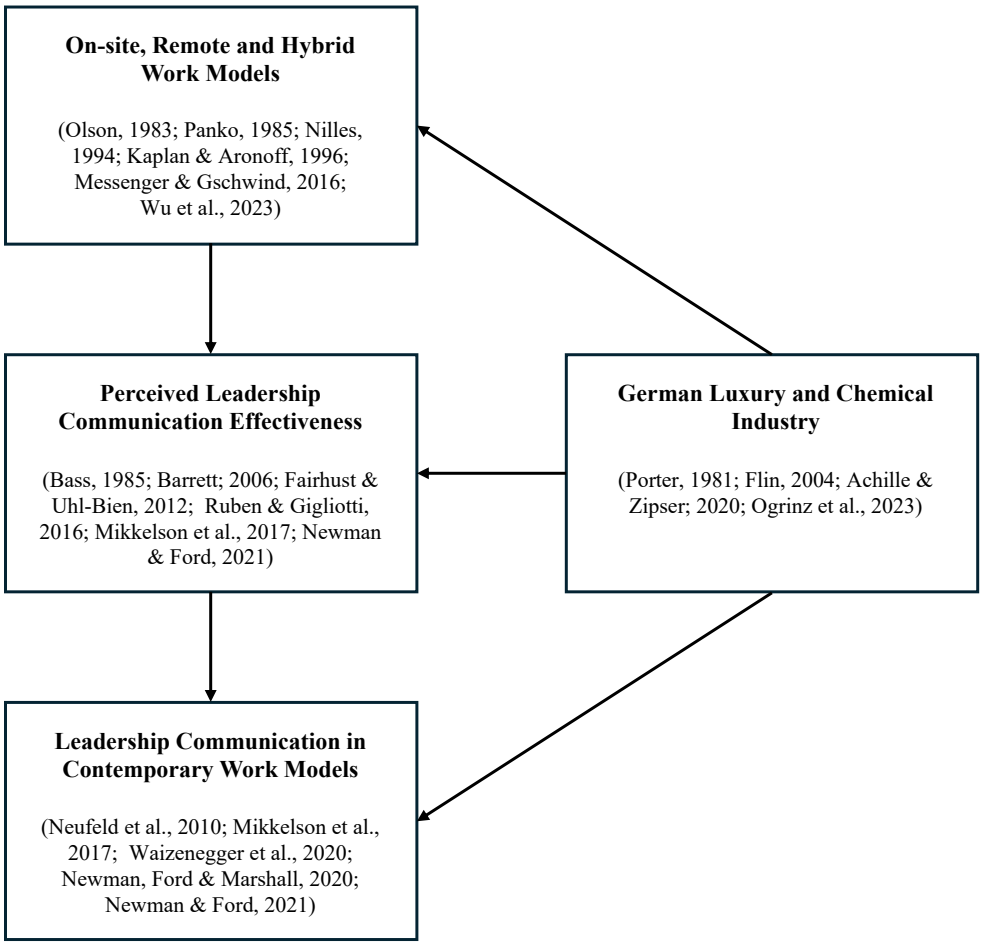
topic at the forefront of academic research. It was found that the industry has not been perceived as a decisive factor regarding the perception of leadership communication by employees. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent differences exist between perceived leadership communication in the various work models within the two industries and what possible drivers may account for these differences. Selecting these industries therefore offers a unique opportunity to examine leadership communication across two structurally distinct sectors. Given these structural differences, there is a possibility that the job distribution within the industries mentioned above creates different prerequisites for the respective work models. Additionally, the significant impact of COVID-19 on the chemical sector and the comparatively low impact on the luxury industry could play a pivotal role in how leadership communication has been established in the various work environments within each sector. Although it is not feasible within the limited scope of this work to explore all potential factors, this thesis aims to investigate perceived leadership communication in the different work models within the luxury and chemical industries. This approach seeks to shed light on both the perception of leadership communication from the employees' perspective and leader perspectives in order to explore whether assessments vary within these industries.

Chapter 4 – Concluding Remarks and Conceptual Model

The evolving nature of work models, particularly influenced and intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, has brought significant changes, especially in how leaders communicate with their employees. As traditional on-site structures persist alongside the rise of remote and hybrid work models, it becomes crucial to understand how leader communication is perceived, in order to maintain organizational effectiveness and improving leadership communication processes. The reviewed literature has highlighted the importance of effective communication in leadership across various academic disciplines. From fundamental theories like transformational leadership to the complexities of communication in virtual settings, it became clear that communication lies at the core of successful leadership.

Figure 2

Conceptual Model



Delving into the research field of remote and hybrid work models thereby has revealed both advantages and challenges. While these models offer flexibility and potential benefits for employees, they also create challenges such as maintaining team cohesion and ensuring effective communication across dispersed teams. Focusing on the luxury and chemical industries thereby provides a unique opportunity to examine leadership communication in different organizational contexts. By doing so, this thesis aims to explore whether industry-specific factors such as business models, market dynamics and the importance of communication in general influence the outcomes of perceived leadership communication and leader assessments.

However, it is important to recognize the gaps in current research, particularly the lack of focus on the specific differences in perceived leadership communication across

contemporary work models, as well as the connection between employee perceptions and leader evaluations. Additionally, the influence of industries on perceived leadership communication remains mainly unexplored. Therefore, this thesis seeks to fill these gaps by investigating how employees in the luxury and chemical industries perceive leadership communication in contemporary work models. By considering both employee perspectives and leader assessments, this thesis aims to offer comprehensive insights that can improve the practical performance of effective leadership communication in today's dynamic work environment.

Part II – Empirical Study

Chapter 5 – Methodology

The empirical section of this thesis describes the approach of gathering data to answer the overall research question of this thesis as well as the respective sub questions, which were developed to examine different aspects and dimensions of the research topic. Therefore, the following section will explain the rationale behind the chosen approach and provide justification for its suitability in addressing the research questions and sub questions.

5.1 Research Relevance

As can be derived from the literature section, the contemporary workforce landscape has undergone significant transformations, with the emergence of hybrid and remote work models alongside traditional office setups (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016; Nilles, 1994). As organizations navigate these shifts, effective leadership communication becomes paramount for maintaining cohesion, motivation, and productivity among teams (Ferreira et al., 2021; Purvanova & Bono, 2009). Despite the growing importance of leadership communication in diverse work environments, recent literature has focused more on effective leadership communication in virtual environments, the perceptions of leader communication effectiveness by virtual team members and the alignment between leader perceptions and employee outcomes (Neufeld et al., 2010; Newman & Ford, 2021; Newman et al., 2020).

Apart from the recently published approach by Mikkelson et al. (2023) on perceived leadership communication effectiveness in various work models, taking a broader view on the topic, the impact of different work models on effective leadership communication has only marginally been considered. Moreover, this topic was hardly examined in qualitative terms, both from the employee perspective and the leader perspective. This makes it even more fundamental to understand how employees in different work models perceive the effectiveness of communication and how leaders adapt their communication strategies to meet the unique challenges and opportunities presented by hybrid and remote work models. By exploring leadership communication within the luxury and chemical industries, this research addresses a critical need for insights into industry-specific dynamics and communication practices, offering valuable implications for organizational leaders, policymakers, and scholars.

5.2 Research Question and Sub-Questions

Based on the theoretical framework and the current state of research, the following overarching research question was formulated: *How do hybrid, remote, and on-site work models influence perceived leadership communication within the luxury industry in comparison to the chemical industry in Germany?* To comprehensively address this research question, six sub-questions were developed to support and structure the investigation of the main research question.

SQ1*: How do employees perceive leadership communication in hybrid, remote, and on-site work models in the German luxury and chemical industry and are there differences in perceptions?*

SQ2: *What factors contribute to variations in perceived leadership communication across hybrid, remote, and on-site work models in the German luxury and chemical industry?*

SQ3: *What are the main communication challenges faced by employees in each work model, and how do they affect their perceptions of leadership effectiveness?*

SQ4: *How do leaders in the German luxury and chemical industry assess communication with employees in different work models and do these approaches align with employee perceptions?*

SQ5: *Are there differences in perceived leadership communication by employees and the perspectives of leaders within the luxury industry compared to the chemical industry?*

5.3 Research Design

To answer the above presented overarching research question as well as the associated sub questions, a three-step mixed methods approach is applied, including a quantitative online survey as well as qualitative interviews. Mixed methods research thereby describes a methodology in which the researcher collects, analyzes, and combines both quantitative and qualitative data in one study (Creswell, 2009a). The mixed methods strategy, which has been applied since 1959, is based on the realization that all methods have limitations but that these could be neutralized or eliminated by using an additional method (Creswell, 2009a). For the purpose of this study, a solely qualitative analysis of perceived leadership communication would not have been able to reflect the personal insights and deeper focal points that emerge from personal conversations in qualitative interviews. This approach therefore was selected

as it enables a comprehensive and broad understanding of the research topic, capturing both individual experiences as well as leader perspectives on leadership communication in contemporary work environments. Moreover, methodological triangulation was applied. Two types of methodological triangulation exist: sequential and simultaneous triangulation Morse (1991). The first type describes methodological approaches that build on one another, in which the results of the first are fundamental to the planning of the next stage. In this thesis, simultaneous triangulation is applied, by means of which qualitative and quantitative methods are used simultaneously and the results complement each other in the data analysis process.

Step 1: *Exploring the status quo in perceived leadership communication.*
To determine how employees in different work models within the luxury industry and the chemical industry perceive the communication with their leader, an online survey approach was chosen as the preferred type of data collection. This choice was made as it offers the advantage that data can be collected quickly and, due to the anonymity provided, the questions regarding the perception of leadership communication could eventually be answered more truthful. The survey implied questions on the determination of the work model, personal focal points of effective leadership communication and the perception of the effectiveness of their current communication with their leader in the respective work model.

Step 2: *Validating the criteria and challenging the status quo.*
For the qualitative interviews with employees, seven participants from the German luxury industry and chemical industry were selected. The qualitative interviews were additionally conducted, to get deeper insights into aspects that positively or negatively influence the perceptions of effective leadership communication, personal focal points or challenges, the use of communication tools and technology as well as future predictions and leadership competences. This was intended to capture the insights and experiences that could not be reflected in the closed questions of a quantitative survey.

Step 3*: Including leader assessments and perspectives.*
For the qualitative expert interviews, eight leaders from different levels and functions in the German luxury as well as chemical industry were selected. This was done to gain

comprehensive insights from both employees and leaders, delve deeper into the strategies behind communicative actions in the respective work models, examine the alignment of employee and leader perceptions, and identify future focal points from an expert perspective. The expert interviews focused on key aspects of communication with employees in different work models, possible challenges, the strategic use of technology and tools and future predictions and leadership competences.

Additionally, this thesis pursues a comparative analysis with regard to the selected industries across the developed research question and sub-questions. Data is collected from both the luxury industry and the chemical industry in order to compare the results based on the structural differences between the industries and to determine the extent to which the industry is an influencing factor in terms of the perception of effective leadership communication in contemporary work environments.

Table 4

Overview Research Questions and Sub-Questions

	Research Question / Sub-Questions	Quantitative	Qualitative
RQ	How do hybrid, remote, and on-site work models influence perceived leadership communication within the luxury industry in comparison to the chemical industry in Germany?	x	x
SQ1	How do employees perceive leadership communication in hybrid, remote, and on-site work models in the German luxury and chemical industry and are there differences in perceptions?	x	
SQ2	What factors contribute to variations in perceived leadership communication across hybrid, remote, and on-site work models?	x	x
SQ3	What are the main communication challenges faced by employees in each work model, and how do they affect their perceptions of leadership effectiveness?		x
SQ4	How do leaders assess communication with employees in the various work models and what challenges, focal points and future developments do they perceive?		x
SQ5	Are there differences in perceived leadership communication by employees and the perspectives of leaders within the luxury industry compared to the chemical industry?	x	x

Table 4 provides an overview of the research and sub-questions, indicating whether they are addressed through quantitative, qualitative, or both approaches. To present a clearer outline of the methodological framework used in this study, the following chapter will first detail the quantitative research methods applied.

5.4 Quantitative Analysis

5.4.1 Data Collection Strategy

As outlined in the previous chapter, the first step of this research consists in a quantitative online survey approach. This approach was selected due to the significance of integrating employees' perceptions in the determination process of effective leadership communication (Hatter & Bass, 1988; Mikkelson et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2020). Given that the thesis aims to compare perceptions across different work models, an online survey allows for the collection of a large amount of data, which enables a broader comparison of how positively leadership communication is perceived across hybrid, remote, and on-site work models. The following chapters further outline the chosen methodological approach, describing the sampling procedure and the final sample, the data collection method and the procedure of data analysis.

5.4.2 Sampling Procedure

For the quantitative online survey, a non-random convenience sampling technique was applied. Survey invitations (Appendix A) were distributed through several channels. Invitations were sent to personal and business contacts via email and LinkedIn, and potential participants were also actively approached on LinkedIn. Moreover, reminders were sent out to increase response rates. Additionally, organizations from the luxury and chemical industries in Germany were contacted with the request to distribute the survey through their internal communication channels. To further increase the sample size, a snowball sampling approach was employed, encouraging contacts, participants, and those involved in the qualitative part of the study to forward the survey to other suitable potential respondents. Only participants who work in the luxury or chemical industries in Germany were eligible to take part in the survey.

5.4.3 Sample

The sample for the quantitative part of the study consists of 109 participants, with 102 participants (male: n=7; female: n=7) completing the online survey, marking a response rate of 93,58%. Among them, 45 participants are working in the luxury industry and 57 in the chemical industry, offering a relatively balanced representation of both sectors.

Since reliable data on the number of employees in the German luxury industry was unavailable, an estimate was made by using revenue and employee data from the German chemical industry, along with revenue figures from the luxury industry. In 2023, the German chemical industry generated approximately 229.3 billion euros in revenue with a workforce of 477.000 employees, resulting in an estimated revenue per employee of around 480.713 euros (Verband der Chemischen Industrie e.V., 2023). Applying this ratio to the German luxury industry, which generated a total revenue of 14.7 billion euros, the workforce for the luxury industry is estimated at roughly 17,470 employees. Based on this estimate, a statistically significant sample size of 384 participants would ideally be required for more robust and reliable results. However, due to the practical constraints of this master's thesis, achieving such a sample size was not feasible. The proportion of participants relative to the estimated total workforce in both industries is approximately 0.033%. Several factors contributed to this limitation. First, logistical and resource-related constraints, including limited time and accessibility to participants, made it difficult to reach the ideal sample size. Additionally, the target groups in the luxury and chemical industries were often challenging to access and geographically dispersed, further complicating recruitment efforts. Despite the smaller sample size, the qualitative interviews with employees and leaders offered valuable insights that enriched the overall findings of this research. This qualitative component provided depth that a larger quantitative sample alone might not have offered.

5.4.4 Data Collection Method

For the quantitative data collection, an online survey on Qualtrics was designed in order to explore the existing perceptions of leadership communication in contemporary work models within the luxury and chemical industry.[13] At the beginning of the survey, participants were provided with general information about the research project and the duration of the survey.

[13] The complete Qualtrics online survey is provided in Appendix 1.

Furthermore, they were informed about the voluntary nature of participation, the minimum age of 18 years and contact options in case of further questions. In order to take part in the survey, participants must give their consent to the information provided. The content part of the survey is divided into three parts.

The first part "Demographic Data and Organization" refers to the demographic information as well as to organization-related information. Demographic information include age, gender and the country of residence. Organization-related information include the identification of the industry as well as the duration of work in the respective industry, the possibility for remote work, the existence of a direct leader, as well as the hierarchical level in the organization. Participants who are under 18 years of age, are not employed in the luxury or chemical industry in Germany, do not have the possibility to work remotely, or do not have a direct leader within their company will be excluded from further participation in the survey at this point.

The participants are first asked which work model they assign themselves to. On-site work is described as 100% on-site work, remote work as 100% remote work and hybrid as a combination of on-site and remote work. Participants are asked to select the work model that applies on average and to exclude occasional and irregular exceptions. Participants who have selected the hybrid work model are then asked for the exact split of on-site and remote days. Furthermore, participants who work in an on-site model or in a hybrid model are asked on how many days the leader is also present on-site in order to determine whether a communicative exchange is possible.

This was followed by the next part of the survey, which focused on perceived leadership communication. This section is introduced by an open question that asks participants to name up to three characteristics or features that come to their mind when they think of effective leadership communication in their work model. Participants who have assigned themselves to an on-site or remote model will receive this question personalized to their on-site or remote work environment. Participants in a hybrid work model will receive the question for both onsite and remote work in order to determine if attributes or characteristics that they consider relevant to their in-office workdays are different to the ones they consider relevant to their remote workdays. These open-ended questions were asked at the beginning of this

section to prevent participants from being biased by the focal points and characteristics of the following questions.

Thereafter, the transformational leadership qualities described in the theory chapter are included, based on the scale of the MLQ Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Due to the theoretical basis of this thesis, only the transformational leadership items were applied from the entire MLQ scale, which consist of 5 questions. The assigned labels of the questions (inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) were not included to avoid confusion of the participants. Furthermore, as the survey focuses on German participants, the German translation of the MLQ Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire by (Rowold & Kersting, 2008) was used. Applying a 5-point Likert scale (Completely disagree-Completely agree), participants are asked to rate the extent to which their leader fulfils the five characteristics outlined in the Transformational Leadership Model.

The following question is based on the Perceived Leadership Communication Questionnaire (PLCQ) by Schneider et al. (2015) and focuses on leader personality traits. This developed questionnaire incorporates several widely used scales from the field of leadership that have been validated by research, thus capturing a compact but reliable picture of perceived leadership communication that allows for a comprehensive picture within the limited scope of this thesis. Participants were asked to express their agreement or disagreement on given statements about leaders on a 5-point Likert scale (completely disagree - completely agree). These statements included aspects such as sensitivity, communicative exchange, and accessibility.

This is followed by a question that considers the use of communication technologies by the leader, based on the scale of virtual team leader communication by Newman et al. (Sean A. Newman et al., 2020). This scale includes four items focusing on different communication technologies, the appropriate use by the leader, online-meeting tools, and live-communication techniques. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which their leader efficiently uses communication technologies, applying a 5-point Likert scale (completely disagree - completely agree).

The last question of the online survey is extracted out of the same scale of Newman et al. (2020) and refers to general daily communication and interaction with the leader. This division into two questions was undertaken in order to delimit the topics, keep the questions shorter and not confuse the participants. Similar to the above-described questions participants are asked to rate the seven presented items on a 5-point Likert scale (completely disagree - completely agree). The items are based on the six practices for effective leadership communication (Newman et al., 2020) that have been presented in the literature part of this thesis, focusing on aspects such as frequency of communication, reliable and swift reactions of the leader and the effective communication of expectations and goals.

The survey took 5 minutes to complete, and the data collection was carried out from the beginning of June until the end of August 2024. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected, this research project used existing, validated scales that have already been extensively tested in the literature and found to be reliable. The scales used in this questionnaire were taken from established studies in which they had already been tested for internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values from these studies were consistently above the acceptable level of 0.70, confirming the high reliability of the scales. Additionally, a pre-test of the survey was conducted to ensure the clarity and functionality of the questionnaire, allowing for adjustments to be made before full distribution.

5.4.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The quantitative data analysis examines the data collected in the conducted online survey and contributes to the answering of the main research question *RQ* as well as the sub-questions *SQ1* and *SQ2* (Table 4). The data analysis was carried out through Creswell's six steps of quantitative data analysis (2009a). The first step before starting with the content analysis is to evaluate the number of participants who completed the questionnaire in fully or did not return it. Second, the effect of the response bias is examined to find out whether the results would change substantially if the non-participants had taken part.

The third step involves the descriptive analysis of the data, which was carried out to obtain a general overview of the distribution of demographic characteristics and the characteristics of the sample. The distribution of age, gender, position, length of employment and distributions of the main variables work model, industry and perceived leadership

communication were determined by calculating distributions, percentages, means and standard deviations and presented in cross tables, frequency tables, bar charts and pie charts. As questions from three different scales were applied to determine perceived leadership communication, Cronbach's alpha was calculated in the first step in order to check the internal consistency of the scales used. The calculation of Cronbach's alpha ensures that the individual scales are reliable and that the items they contain consistently measure the same construct (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). A high alpha value indicates a high homogeneity of the scale, which was considered crucial in this study to ensure the reliability of the measurements. A composite variable was then constructed to provide a comprehensive measure of perceived leadership communication by averaging the means of the three scales. This composite variable allowed for a standardized analysis while maintaining the detailed results of the individual scales.

The fifth step involves the selection of the statistical program and the statistical methods. For the overall analysis of the collected data, as well as for the illustration of the results with graphs and charts, the statistical program SPSS was used.

The sixth step was to analyze the differences in the perception of leadership communication between the different work models (on-site, remote, hybrid) within the industries using an analysis of variance (ANOVA). The ANOVA was chosen because it allows to compare the mean values of several groups at the same time (Creswell, 2009b). For this work, it was required to identify differences in the perception of leadership communication between the three different work models. The ANOVA assesses whether the differences observed in the mean values of the groups are statistically significant, which provides a solid basis for further analyses. Post-hoc tests with Bonferroni correction were additionally carried out in order to identify the specific differences between the groups more precisely and to minimize the risk of error that can occur when multiple comparisons are made.

In order to now analyze differences in the perception of leadership communication between the luxury and chemical industries, a T-test for independent samples was carried out. The T-test for independent samples enables the comparison of the mean values of two independent groups (Creswell, 2009b). In this study, the test was applied to determine whether the perception of leadership communication is significantly different between the participants

of the luxury as compared to the chemical industry. This provides a clear statistical basis for identifying industry-specific differences in leadership perceptions.

A multiple regression analysis was then conducted to analyze the relationship between work model, industry and perceived leadership communication. The multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the influence of several independent variables on the dependent variable (perceived leadership communication) at the same time (Creswell, 2009b). This method allows to determine the relative influence of each work model and industry sector while controlling for other variables. As a result, more detailed statements can be made about the specific drivers of leadership communication.

The open questions of the online survey regarding characteristics and focal points of effective leadership communication were analyzed by classifying the given answers into categories. These categories were revised and structured and the frequencies of the statements were presented in a cross table.

The sixth step involves the presentation and interpretation of the final results. The interpretation includes the discussion of the significance of the results, the linking of the results with the research questions, the presentation of possible explanations for the findings and possible conclusions on the previously presented theory as well as the discussion of implications for the future.

5.5 Qualitative Analysis

5.5.1 Data Collection Strategy

The qualitative research part of this study consists of a qualitative content analysis, implying qualitative interviews with unstructured and open-ended questions that provide indirect information filtered through the views and opinions of participants (Creswell, 2009b). In the context of this study, interviews with employees and leaders regarding effective leadership communication in different work models are conducted. The explorative character of the qualitative research approach therefore allows to capture participants' perceptions, key aspects, perceived challenges, and future focal points and thereby gaining additional insights from individual perspectives that complement the collected quantitative data.

The following chapters describe the detailed methodological approach of the conducted qualitative content analysis. This includes the outlining of the sampling procedures, the presentation of the final sample, the method for data collection and the procedure of data analysis.

5.5.2 Sampling Procedure

The qualitative part of this research aims to explore employee perceptions on effective leadership communication in greater detail, identifying specific aspects that influence perceptions within the different work models. To obtain the broadest possible insight and to explore leadership communication from both the sender and receiver perspectives, leader interviews were additionally conducted. These interviews provide a comprehensive view of the challenges, focal points, and potential future developments in leadership communication across hybrid, remote, and on-site work environments. Consequently, the sample for this research contains of two groups, employees and leaders from the luxury and chemical industries in Germany, offering a diverse perspective on how leadership communication is perceived and practiced within the contemporary work models.

For the recruitment of participants, a non-random convenience sampling technique was applied. Interview invitations (Appendix A) were distributed to both employees and leaders via email and LinkedIn. A total of 68 invitations were sent out, resulting in 8 participants. The remaining participants were recruited through business contacts and the snowball sampling approach, asking participants to refer to other potentially suitable participants, similar to the method used for the quantitative part.

To obtain a heterogeneous sample, the recruiting process focused on balanced distribution of gender. Moreover, this research only considers employees who work in office jobs in the respective industries and potentially have the opportunity to work remotely. There are three main reasons for this restriction of participants. The first reason is to reduce confounding variables. Considering all areas of work in an organization and including roles outside of the office could introduce additional variables, such as the work environment, job roles in the respective areas or access to technology. These factors could bias the results. By focusing on office activities, potential confounding variables can be minimized, which increases the validity of the results. The second reason lies in the comparability of the sample. Restricting

the sample to office jobs and the possibility of working remotely increases the comparability of the sample, as all participants share similar work environments and conditions. This in turn allows for a more in-depth analysis and enables a richer comparison between participants and industries. The third reason lies in the communication-related focus of this research. As this thesis looks at perceived leadership communication, it is important to focus on the context in which this communication mainly takes place. Office jobs provide a clear framework for communication within an organization, while other work areas such as production or retail may have different dynamics. This aspect also increases the comparability of the sample and ultimately the validity of the results. Additionally, the sample was stratified by industry and work model. This approach ensured that data was collected from both sectors and across all three work models, allowing for the identification of meaningful differences between the groups.

5.5.3 Sample

For the qualitative part of this survey, the sample contains 15 interview participants (male: n=9; female: n=6), of which 8 work in the luxury industry and 7 in the chemical industry. All 15 participants match the above-described participating criteria. The interview participants work across various professional sectors, including research, retail, human resources, finance, marketing, and management, and are holding diverse roles. Table 5 provides a detailed overview of the participants, including their roles, professional positions, industries, interview dates, and the duration of each interview.

Table 5

Participants Qualitative Employee and Leader Interviews

Interview	Role	Job Position	Company	Industry	Interview Date	Interview Length
01	Employee	HR Specialist	BASF	Chemical	06.06.2024	26:48 Minutes
02	Employee	Compensation Specialist	BASF	Chemical	07.06.2024	36:32 Minutes
03	Employee	Payroll Accountant	BASF	Chemical	11.06.2024	41:24 Minutes
04	Employee	Collective Bargaining	BASF	Chemical	11.03.2024	44:35 Minutes
05	Employee	Digital Marketing Manager	LVMH	Luxury	17.06.2024	30:17 Minutes
06	Employee	Accountant	Anonymous	Luxury	17.06.2024	26:06 Minutes

Interview	Role	Job Position	Company	Industry	Interview Date	Interview Length
07	Employee	Project Manager Visual Merchandising	Anonymous	Luxury	19.06.2024	44:05 Minutes
08	Leader	Head of Research Division	BASF	Chemical	12.06.2024	33:23 Minutes
09	Leader	Head of Human Resources	BASF	Chemical	14.06.2024	33:07 Minutes
10	Leader	CEO	Kaimann GmbH	Chemical	17.06.2024	36:26 Minutes
11	Leader	CEO	ILUXI GmbH	Luxury	22.06.2024	47:03 Minutes
12	Leader	Head of Retail	LVMH	Luxury	26.06.2024	44:29 Minutes
13	Leader	Head of Marketing	LVMH	Luxury	29.07.2024	31:53 Minutes
14	Leader	Head of Commercial	Richemont SA	Luxury	29.07.2024	32:06 Minutes
15	Leader	Managing Director	LVMH	Luxury	30.07.2024	31:04 Minutes

Ten participants are employed by LVMH, the world's largest luxury corporation, and BASF, the largest chemical corporation globally. Richemont SA represents the third-largest luxury corporation worldwide. The remaining companies involved include a mix of mid-sized enterprises and start-ups, operating within the luxury and chemical industry. To protect confidentiality, the interview participants cannot be directly linked to specific companies. Additionally, two company names have been withheld at the request of participants to ensure anonymity.

5.5.4 Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews were selected for the qualitative part of this study as they offer a structured framework while allowing the flexibility to explore participants' specific examples and experiences through follow-up questions (Kallio et al., 2016). This approach was deemed most appropriate to gain a comprehensive understanding of the core aspects of effective leadership communication, while also allowing for the necessary adaptability when introducing new perspectives.

To understand the **employee perspective** on leadership communication, a structured interview guide was developed (Appendix C.2). The questionnaire consists of fifteen questions with respective follow-up questions in four main content categories: background information on the person and organization, perception of leadership communication, communication challenges, tools and practices, and future developments and recommendations.

First, a short introduction is given, which includes a welcome, a brief explanation of the context and the duration of the procedure, a reference to the anonymization of the data as well as the declaration of consent and the clarification of possible open questions. After this section, the recording is started and the first content-related section on background information about the person and organization begins. The participant is asked to report on the organization and its industry, which is supplemented with follow-up questions on the job title, the current work model, and the question of how long they have been working in this work model.

The second part of the interview focuses on the perception of communication by leaders. At the beginning, the participant is asked about the fundamental role and importance of leadership communication for their work and the extent to which the leader pursues a strategic approach in this regard. If the answer was yes, they were asked about particularly effective practices or strategies that are used in the participant's particular work model, such as regular exchange meetings. The following question identifies the aspects participants consider particularly important regarding their communication with leaders in their respective work models.

On this basis, the following question presents the six practices for effective leadership communication by Newman and Ford (2021), whose importance the participant should classify in relation to their work model. This question is intended to determine whether the focus is set differently depending on the work model and which factors may be more relevant in an on-site setting than in a virtual environment. The third part of the interview relates to challenges in communication and first asks about the communication challenges in relation to leadership communication that have been faced in their own work model to date. Depending on the accuracy of the answer, follow-up questions on the impact on the effectiveness of communication were asked in order to obtain even more detailed insights.

This is supplemented with questions on how leaders could better overcome or eliminate these challenges, what additional measures could be taken to make improvements and to what extent feedback opportunities exist for employees.

The fourth part focuses on tools and practices. It asks which tools and platforms are used for communication and to what extent the platforms used are effective in the respective work model. In addition, the questionnaire asks to what extent additional measures are taken by leaders to promote collaboration and team cohesion and, if so, what these measures are.
The fifth and final part of this study delves into the anticipated future developments in leadership communication and asks participants to provide strategic recommendations as well as future focal points. This part aims to capture insights from participants regarding the critical areas within their respective work models that require enhancement to improve the effectiveness of leadership communication moving forward. Participants are encouraged to articulate desired changes and initiatives that leaders should undertake to enhance communication effectiveness. Furthermore, they are asked to name aspects that they think will play a greater and more significant role in the future. Finally, the questionnaire provides an opportunity for participants to add any additional comments they may have and briefly outlines the next steps before closing the interview.

For the qualitative **leader interviews**, a second interview guide was established (Appendix C.2). As this questionnaire seeks to investigate the same construct as the employee version but from a leader perspective, the questionnaire is structured in a similar way to the above-described version, consisting of 16 questions with respective sub-questions in the same five main categories: background information on the person and organization, perception of leadership communication, communication challenges, tools and practices, and future developments and recommendations.

To begin, as well a short introduction including a welcome, a brief explanation of the context and the duration of the procedure, a reference to the anonymization of the data as well as the declaration of consent and the clarification of possible open questions is given. Thereafter, the recording is started and the first content-related section on background information about the person and organization begins. First, the leaders are asked to introduce their position and name the industry and organization in which they work. This was supplemented with

follow-up questions about the work model, the duration of work in this model, the number of employees they lead and their work model.

The second part begins with a question about the role of leadership communication in the fulfillment of the position and its importance for collaboration with employees. Subsequently, the existence of a strategic approach to communication in different work models is explored, as well as the key factors of effective communication that the leader believes are fundamental to the different work models. This assessment is further deepened by the follow-up question of how leadership communication in virtual work environments such as hybrid and remote work differs from communication in traditional work environments and which aspects are decisive in this regard. Furthermore, the practices used to lead and motivate the potentially dispersed team are discussed. This is followed by the third part of the questionnaire on challenges in communication, which is introduced with a question about challenges for effective communication with employees in different work models. Based on this, the leader is asked to assess the extent to which leadership communication in remote work environments poses greater challenges than in hybrid or on-site environments and, if a model was named, why this is the case. In addition, the extent to which existing communication strategies are regularly adapted to address possible challenges and maintain effective leadership communication is questioned.

The fourth part focuses on technologies and tools and first inquires which technologies have proven to be particularly effective in supporting communicative exchange. Depending on the detail of the answer, the specific tool, the use of tools for different purposes and the regular review of the suitability of the technology as well as feedback opportunities for employees are additionally asked. Furthermore, leaders are requested to name additional measures that they take with the help of technology to promote collaboration and team cohesion, especially with regard to a digitalized work environment.

The final part of the questionnaire seeks the leaders' assessment of future developments and recommendations regarding leadership communication effectiveness in different work environments. First, leaders were asked how they see the future of leadership communication in different work models, followed by a question about the specific factors that they believe will play a greater and more important role in the future. Moreover, the leaders are encouraged to give recommendations for the general implementation of effective leadership

communication in decentralized work environments as well as for improving existing communication measures. This concludes the content part of the interview. The following final section addresses any additional comments, outlines the next steps, and ends with a farewell, bringing the interview to a close.

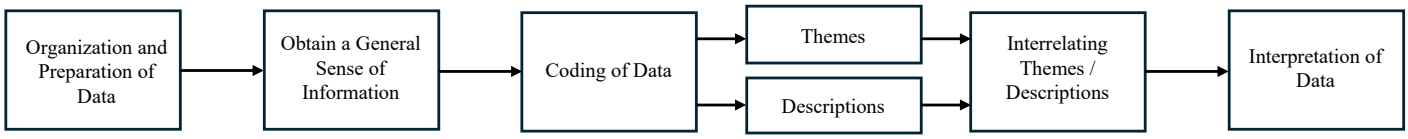
For the employee as well as the leader interviews, a pre-test was first conducted to ensure the interview guide's effectiveness and to verify the functionality of the chosen categories and questions. In total, 15 interviews were held between June and July 2024 using the online platform Microsoft Teams. The interviews lasted between 26:06 and 47:03 minutes, with an average duration of around 36 minutes. For data analysis purposes, the interviews were transcribed and anonymized. Since the original discussions were conducted in German, the transcripts were translated into the English language. In order to provide a complete and accurate work, the interview transcripts were attached to this thesis (Appendix D).

5.5.5 Qualitative Data Analysis Procedure

The qualitative data analysis examines the data collected in the qualitative interviews with employees and leaders, referring to the answering of the sub-questions *SQ2, SQ3,* and *SQ4*. The data analysis is thereby based on Creswell's (2009) structure for qualitative data analysis (Figure 3). The structure contains six steps which will be described in more detail in the following.

Figure 3

Six Steps of Qualitative Data Analysis



Note: According to Creswell (2009)

The first and second step involve the organization and preparation of the data for analysis as well as the initial readthrough of the collected data. This includes transcribing the conducted interviews, scanning the collected material, sorting as well as arranging the data depending on the used sources of information and getting a sense of the sense and depth of the

information provided (Creswell, 2009). Although a wide range of questions were asked during the interviews, only responses directly related to the research questions, specifically related to leadership communication across different work models, were coded and analyzed. Responses that regarded other topics, such as general advantages and disadvantages of work models, which were not directly related to leadership communication, were excluded from further analysis. Moreover, during the interviews, participants were also asked about the feedback mechanisms provided by leaders. However, while this topic yielded interesting insights, it was not directly relevant to the core research questions concerning leadership communication in different work models. As such, this information was not included in the final analysis. Future research could explore this area in more depth, as it may offer valuable perspectives on other aspects of leadership effectiveness.

As a third step, the coding of the material is performed, which describes the assigning of text data to categories and labeling those categories. For this step, the statistical program MAXQDA is used, which supports the process of systematically evaluating and interpreting qualitative texts (Creswell, 2009). The development of the categories followed a deductive-inductive approach, with most categories defined prior to coding, and additional ones introduced during the initial review of the interviews. The coding guide includes 56 codes for the employee interviews, organized into six main subcategories: *Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication, Assessment of Leadership Communication Practices, Communication Challenges, Communication Tools and Technology, Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences, and Other Influencing Factors.* For the leader interviews, 66 codes were established, divided into seven subcategories, which additionally include the category *Communication in Different Work Models*.

The fourth step includes the use of the coding process to implement descriptions and themes for analysis. Description thereby implies a rendering of information in a specific setting (Creswell, 2009b). Thereafter, a smaller number of themes were generated, which function as findings in the further stages of this thesis. The fifth step implies the representation of the descriptions and themes in the qualitative narrative, using subthemes, illustrations, various perspectives from participants and quotations.

The sixth and final step involves the interpretation or meaning of the collected data. A total of 613 codes were assigned throughout the transcripts, with an average of 41 codes per

transcript. To address potential bias from the researcher, several steps were taken to ensure the quality of the study. In order to maintain reliability, a consistent coding system was applied to all interviews, and an independent reviewer additionally verified the performed coding (Creswell, 2009b). To guarantee validity, a researcher external to the project, without prior involvement, assessed the accuracy of the transcriptions, ensured a coherent relationship between the research questions and coding categories, and verified that the data analysis was conducted appropriately. Based on the previously generated results between the contemporary work models and the perceived leadership communication effectiveness, the overall results were compared and analyzed with regard to the industry. It was examined to what extent the perceptions of leader communication effectiveness in the contemporary work models differ depending on the industry and whether the qualitative interviews with employees and leaders indicate different roles and focal points of effective leadership communication as well as different strategies or approaches carried out.

5.6 Ethical Considerations

Prior to the collection of the quantitative and qualitative data, informed consent has been collected from all participants involved. For the quantitative survey, consent was obtained at the beginning as a prerequisite for participation. In contrast, for the qualitative interviews, each participant signed a consent form before the start of the interview (Appendix E). These steps ensure that participants are fully aware of and agree to the terms of their participation. They were provided with comprehensive information regarding the study's objectives, the measures in place to safeguard confidentiality, and their inherent right to withdraw from the study at any point before or during participation. Furthermore, the study's purpose, potential risks associated with their involvement, and a clear outline of their rights as participants are provided (Creswell, 2009b). This ensures that they possess an overall understanding of what their participation entails and enables them to make informed decisions regarding their involvement. Subsequently, confidentiality measures are thematized, which are crucial in upholding the integrity and ethical standards of the study. This contains a range of strategies designed to protect participants' identities and sensitive information. Measures such as data security protocols and secure data storage are implemented to protect the collected data from unauthorized access or disclosure, ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process.

Chapter 6 – Results

6.1 Quantitative Results

Based on the quantitative online survey of employees regarding effective leadership communication in on-site, remote and hybrid work models, this thesis was able to identify valuable results, which are presented in the following chapter. In the first step, the descriptive statistics on participants, work models and perceived leadership communication are presented. Second, the reliability analysis of the scales is explained. In the third step, the results on the influence of work model and industry as well as other variables on perceived leadership communication are presented and illustrated. Fourth, the results of the open questions on characteristics and qualities of Effective Leadership Communication are outlined. Finally, the core results are summarized.

Table 6

Gender and Age Distribution

		Age					
		18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56 or older	Total
Gender	Male	2	14	18	10	6	50
	Female	2	35	9	5	1	52
Total		4	49	27	15	7	102

First, the **descriptive statistics** are carried out, starting with the factors gender and age. The distribution of participants by gender and age group (Table 6) shows an even gender distribution with a total of 50 male and 52 female participants in the sample. Nobody who assigned themselves to a non-binary or third gender group. Most participants can be assigned to the 26-35 age category, with a total of 49 people, of whom 14 are male and 35 are female. The 36-45 age group includes 27 participants, with a higher proportion of males (18 participants) than females (9 participants). The 46-55 age group includes 15 participants, of which 10 are male and 5 are female. The least represented age groups are the over 56s with a total of 7 participants and the 10–25-year-olds with a total of 4 participants.

Table 7

Position

Position	N	%
Entry-level employee	10	9,8%
Mid-level employee	55	53,9%
Senior-level employee with decision-making authority	22	21,6%
Managerial employee	9	8,8%
Executive Management	6	5,9%

Table 8

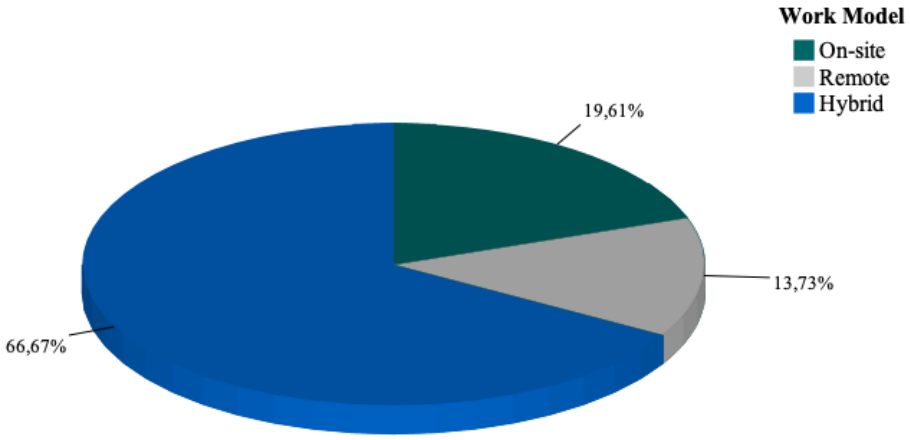
Length of Service

Length of Service	N	%
Less than a year	1	1,0%
1–3 years	26	25,5%
4–6 years	34	33,3%
7–10 years	15	14,7%
Over 10 years	26	25,5%

Examining the participants' position in the company (Table 7) and their length of service (Table 8), it becomes apparent that the majority of participants (53.9%) are employed in mid-level positions, while 21.6% of participants are employed in senior positions with decision-making authority. A smaller proportion of participants are employed in entry-level positions (9.8%) or in management, with 8.8% of participants working as senior managers and 5.9% in management. Regarding the length of service, 33.3% of participants have been with the company for 4 to 6 years, while 25.5% of participants have been employed in the company for either 1 to 3 years or more than 10 years. A smaller number of participants have been part of the company for less than one year (1.0%) or for 7 to 10 years (14.7%).

Figure 4

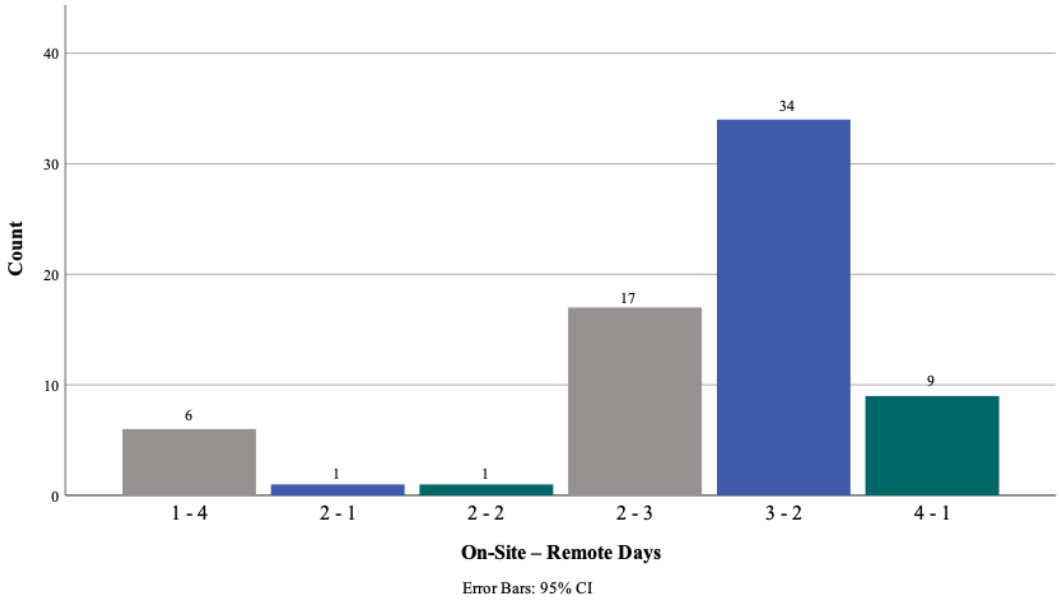
Work Model Distribution



The pie chart (Figure 4) shows the distribution of work models among the 102 participants of the online survey. It becomes visible that the hybrid work model is most frequently represented with a share of 66.67%. This shows that the majority of participants work both on-site and remotely. The on-site work model ranks second with 19.61% of participants, indicating that a significant but much smaller proportion of the workforce is mainly working at the physical workplace. The remote work model is the least common form of working, representing 13.73% of the surveyed workforce.

Figure 5

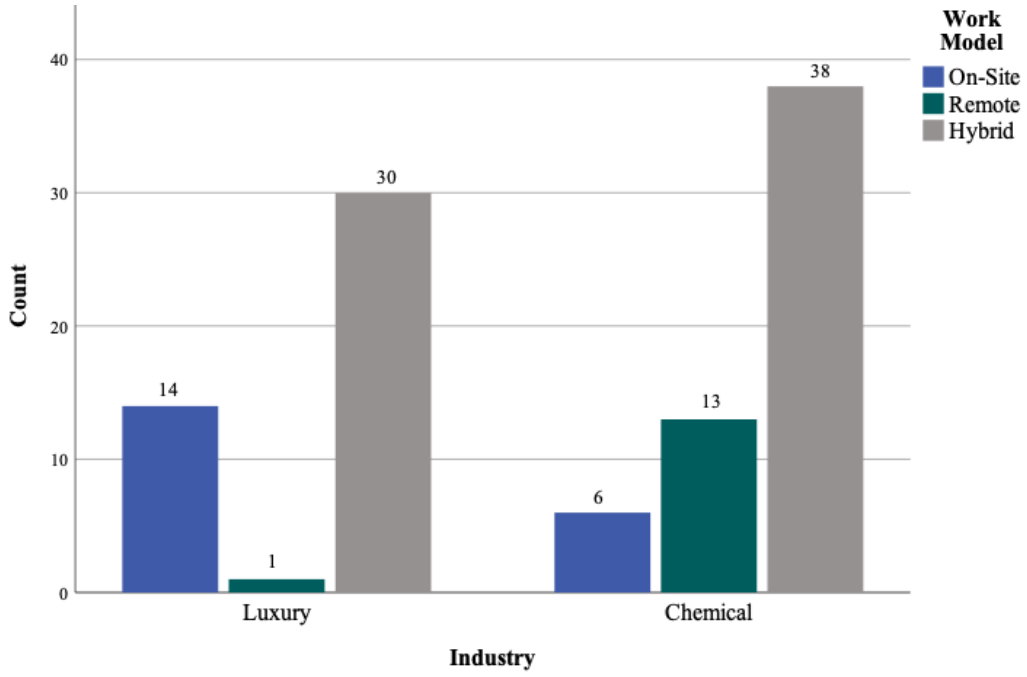
Share of Workday Combinations in Hybrid Work Models



When looking at the distribution of combinations of working days (Figure 5), it becomes clear that the most frequently chosen combination includes 3 days on site and 2 days remotely. This was stated by 34 of the participants. The second most frequently stated combination of working days (17 participants) included 2 days on site and 3 days working remotely. These results show that the majority of hybrid employees divide their working time relatively equally between the office and home office. The combination of 4 days on site and 1 day remote was chosen by 9 participants, while only 6 participants stated that they work 1 day on site and 4 days remotely. The combinations of 2-1 and 4-1 working days are even less common.

Figure 6

Industry Distribution by Work Model



Furthermore, the distribution of industries by work model was analyzed. The presented bar chart (Figure 6) highlights that the hybrid work model is most frequently represented in both industries. While it clearly dominates in the chemical industry with 38 mentions, the luxury industry also has a relevant proportion of on-site workers compared to the hybrid model in that industry. In the luxury industry, 14 people work on-site, while in the chemical industry, 13 people are assigned to this work model. The remote work model is less common in both industries, with 6 people working remotely in the chemical industry and only one participant

in the luxury industry. This work model therefore plays a relatively subordinate role in both industries.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics of the Perception of Leadership Communication

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PLC	102	2,80	5,00	4,1874	,54025
Valid N (listwise)	102				

The descriptive statistics for the perception of leadership communication (PLC) show that the sample consists of 102 valid responses. The assessments of leadership communication vary between a minimum of 2.80 and a maximum of 5.00. The mean value for the perception of leadership communication is 4.1874, which indicates that the majority of participants perceive leadership communication as rather positive. The standard deviation equals 0.54025, which indicates a moderate dispersion of the ratings around the mean.

Table 10

Perceived Leadership Communication in Contemporary Work Models

					95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Min.	Max.
On-site	20	3,6499	,59851	,13383	3,3698	3,9300	2,80	4,57
Remote	14	4,0075	,45820	,12246	3,7430	4,2721	3,00	5,00
Hybrid	68	4,3825	,40747	,04941	4,2839	4,4811	3,23	5,00
Total	102	4,1874	,54025	,05349	4,0813	4,2935	2,80	5,00

Looking at the perceptions of leadership communication in the respective work models, the descriptive statistics show that the hybrid work model has the highest mean score for perceived leadership communication (M = 4.3825, SD = 0.40747), indicating that employees working in a hybrid setting tend to view leadership communication more positively compared to other models. This is followed by the remote work model, which has a mean score of 4.0075 (SD = 0.45820). The on-site work model has the lowest mean score (M = 3.6499, SD = 0.59851), suggesting that employees in a fully on-site setting perceive

leadership communication less favorably. The overall mean score for all participants is 4.1874 (SD = 0.54025), with scores ranging from 2.80 to 5.00, indicating a generally positive perception of leadership communication across the sample. The standard deviations suggest that there is some variability in responses within each work model, with on-site work showing the highest variability.

A **reliability analysis** was conducted, as questions from three different scales were used to measure perceived leadership communication, with each scale specifically adapted to the research topic. As only parts of these scales were applicable, the reliability of each scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to ensure consistency in the measurement of perceived leadership communication. The first scale resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.854, the second 0.863 and the third 0.801. These values indicate a high degree of internal consistency between the items of each scale and confirm that they reliably measure the construct they are intended to measure. A composite variable was then constructed to provide a comprehensive measure of perceived leadership communication by averaging the means of the three scales. This composite variable allowed for a standardized analysis while maintaining the detailed results of the individual scales. The composite score was calculated for each respondent (N = 102) and produced a descriptive statistic with a minimum score of 2.80, a maximum score of 5.00, a mean of 4.1874 and a standard deviation of 0.54025. These results indicate that, on average, respondents rated leadership communication favorably. The internal consistency of the composite variable was further assessed and yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.844, indicating that the composite variable is a reliable and solid measure of overall leadership communication across the different scales utilized.

First, the influence of **work model** and **industry** on **perceived leadership communication** is examined. In order to answer the research question SQ1, several statistical tests were carried out. First, a two-factor ANOVA analysis was conducted (Table 9) in order to identify the main and interaction effects of the factors work model and industry on the dependent variable perceived leadership communication.

Table 11

Impact of Work Model and Industry on Perceived Leadership Communication

Dependent Variable: PLC

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	12,060[a]	5	2,412	13,293	<,001
Intercept	446,306	1	446,306	2459,739	<,001
Industry	2,551	1	2,551	14,058	<,001
Work Model	10,325	2	5,163	28,452	<,001
Industry * Work Model	1,209	2	,605	3,332	,040
Error	17,419	96	,181		
Total	1817,983	102			
Corrected Total	29,479	101			

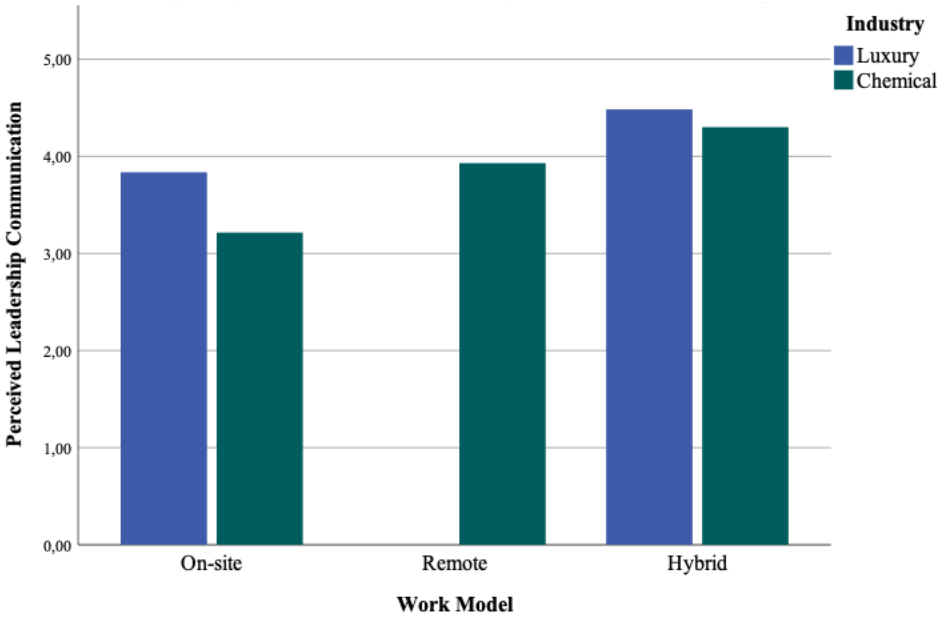
a. R Squared = ,409 (Adjusted R Squared = ,378)

The analysis of the main effects shows that both the work model and the industry have a significant influence on the perception of leadership communication. Specifically, the industry ($F(1, 96) = 14.058$, $p < 0.001$) shows a considerable effect on the perception of leadership communication, indicating differences between the luxury and chemical industries. Similarly, the work model ($F(2, 96) = 28.452$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrates that the perception of leadership communication varies notably across different work models (hybrid, remote, on-site).

Additionally, a significant interaction effect between industry and work model was found ($F(2, 96) = 3.332$, $p = 0.040$), suggesting that the effect of the work model on leadership communication perception varies depending on the industry. More specifically, the work model influences the perception of leadership communication differently in the luxury compared to the chemical industry. The overall model is significant ($F(5, 96) = 13.293$, $p < 0.001$) and explains approximately 40.9% of the variance in the perception of leadership communication, indicating a moderate to strong explanatory power of the model. The unexplained portion of the variance, which is not covered by the model, is reflected in the mean square error of 0.181. The adjusted R-squared is 0.378, implying that the model makes a strong contribution to explaining the variability in the perception of leadership communication.

Figure 7

Impact of Work Model and Industry on Perceived Leadership Communication



To further explore the differences between the work models, Bonferroni post-hoc tests were conducted, as visualized in Figure 7. In this visualization it was found that a single extreme value in the „Luxury Industry –Remote Work' category (one participant) caused a significant distortion in the graphical representation of the results. Therefore, this value was excluded from the bar chart to ensure a clearer visualization. In all other analyses, the value remains included in order to present the results completely and without any bias while maintaining the consistency of the analysis. These confirm that leadership communication is significantly higher in hybrid models than both on-site (Mean Difference = 0.7326, $p < 0.001$) and remote (Mean Difference = 0.3750, $p = 0.010$) work models. No significant difference was found between the on-site and remote models (Mean Difference = 0.3576, $p = 0.054$).

To complement the ANOVA results, a Pearson correlation was conducted to further investigate the relationships between perceived leadership communication and the variables work model and industry. Moreover, the influences of other variables such as age, gender, position, length of employment, and presence of the leader were examined.

Table 12

Correlations of PLC with Multiple Variables

		PLC	On Site	Remote	Hybrid	Industry
Pearson Correlation	PLC	1,000	-,494	-,133	,513	-,177
	On Site	-,494	1,000	-,197	-,698	-,257
	Remote	-,133	-,197	1,000	-,564	,297
	Hybrid	,513	-,698	-,564	1,000	,000
	Industry	-,177	-,257	,297	,000	1,000
	Length of Service	-,059	,029	,041	-,054	,624
	Position	-,110	,040	,070	-,084	,404
	Age	-,016	,087	,082	-,133	,550
	Gender	,227	-,010	-,179	,139	-,397
	Presence Leader	,326	-,090	-,691	,580	-,263

Looking at the factor **work model** in connection to perceived leadership communication, the results of the correlation clearly show that perceived leadership communication correlates strongly positively with the hybrid work model (r = 0.513), which indicates that the hybrid model leads to a more positive perception of leadership communication. In contrast, there is a strong negative correlation between the perception of leadership communication and on-site work (r = -0.494). Moreover, a weak negative correlation (-0.133) with remote work indicates that there is a slight tendency for higher perceived leadership communication to be associated with less remote work, although the relationship is not very strong. This could imply that remote work does not significantly influence the perception of leadership communication.

An ANOVA analysis (Table 10) was performed to compare the perception of leadership communication between the on-site, remote and hybrid work models in greater detail.

Table 13

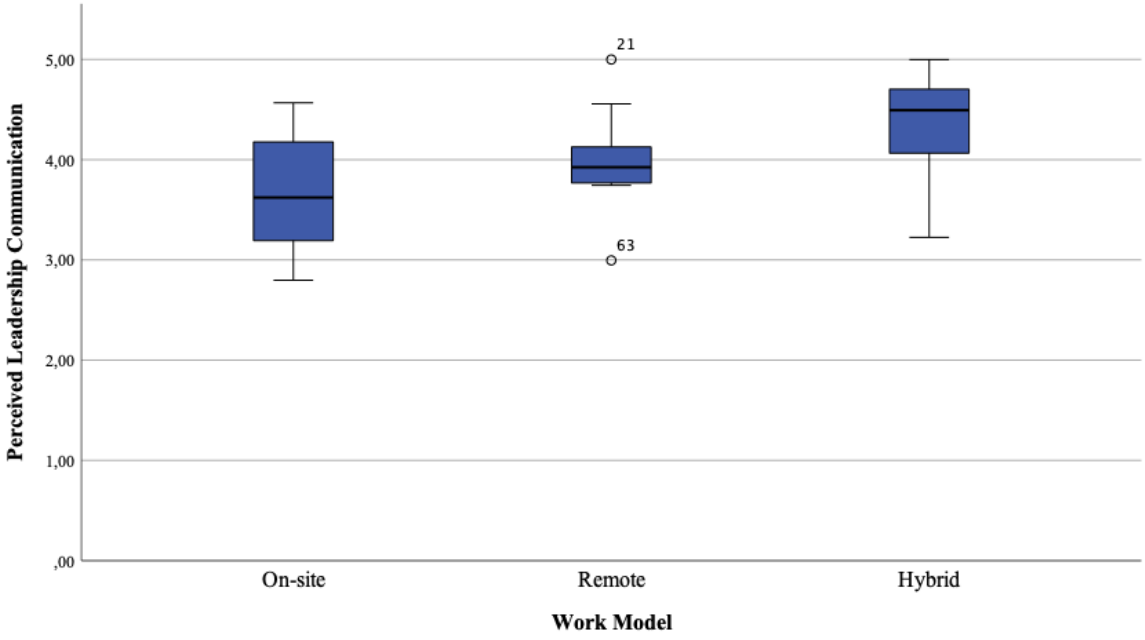
ANOVA of PLC

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8,819	2	4,410	21,131	<,001
Within Groups	20,659	99	,209		
Total	29,479	101			

The ANOVA revealed significant differences between the groups, $F(2, 99) = 21.131$, $p < 0.001$. This indicates that the work model has a significant influence on the perception of leadership communication. The differences between the groups are statistically significant, which indicates that the different work models do indeed lead to different perceptions of leadership communication. The subsequent post-hoc tests with Bonferroni correction showed that the hybrid way of working has a significantly higher perception of leadership communication than the on-site ($MD = 0.73259$, $p < 0.001$) and remote way of working ($MD = 0.37498$, $p = 0.019$). No significant difference was found between the on-site and remote work model ($MD = 0.35761$, $p = 0.081$).

Figure 8

PLC by Work Model



The boxplot illustrates the distribution of perceived leadership communication across the three work models on-site, remote and hybrid. The results show that the on-site group has a moderate to broad distribution of scores, with a median in the middle range, which indicates different perceptions within this group. The remote group, on the other hand, shows a narrower distribution around a low median, which indicates that leadership communication tends to be perceived less positively in this group. The hybrid group shows a relatively narrow distribution with a higher median, which suggests that this group views leadership communication more positively.

Regarding the factor **industry** in regard to perceived leadership communication, the correlation with the perception of leadership communication shows a weak negative relationship (r = -0.177). This suggests that the perception of leadership communication in one of the two industries is lower than in the other. This could indicate industry-specific differences in the leadership and communication practices. In order to compare the perceptions of leadership communication in different work models with regard to the factor industry in more detail, additional statistical tests were performed. First, an independent T-test was conducted to analyze the differences in perception of leadership communication between the luxury and chemical industry.

Table 14

Independent Samples T-Test of PLC

		t-test for Equality of Means			
		Significance Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower
PLC_Constitute	Equal variances assumed	,075	,19160	,10656	-,01981
	Equal variances not assumed	,071	,19160	,10511	-,01697

The Levene test for equality of variance resulted in a p-value of 0.317, which indicates that the variances of the two groups can be considered equal. The T-test itself showed a mean difference of 0.192 points between the two groups. The two-sided p-value totaled 0.075, which is just above the usual significance level of 0.05. This suggests that the observed difference in perception of leadership communication between the two industries is not statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranged from -0.020 to 0.403. As this interval also includes the value 0, there is a possibility that the difference in the mean values is only random and there may be no real difference between the two groups in the sample population.

To get deeper insights into the strength and direction of the relationship between work model, industry and perceived leadership communication, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The aim of this analysis was to determine how strongly the work model (remote,

hybrid, on-site) and the belonging to a certain industry (luxury or chemical) influence the perception of leadership communication. The results of the regression analysis show that the relationship is significant ($F(3, 98) = 19.029$, $p < 0.001$) and can explain approximately 36.8% of the variance in satisfaction with leadership communication ($R^2 = 0.368$). This indicates that both work model and industry are significant predictors of perceived leadership communication. The analysis of the coefficients indicates that the remote work model shows significantly higher satisfaction with leadership communication compared to the on-site work model ($B = 0.549$, $p = 0.001$). An even stronger positive effect was found for the hybrid work model, where satisfaction contributes 0.811 points more positively compared to the on-site category ($B = 0.811$, $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, the industry also showed a significant influence on satisfaction with leadership communication. Working in the chemical industry was associated with lower satisfaction ($B = -0.305$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that perceived leadership communication tends to be rated lower in the chemical industry than in the luxury industry. These results do not contradict the previously performed T-test, which focused only on the industry and showed no significant difference in this context. The regression analysis in turn suggests that the industry has a significant influence on satisfaction when other variables such as the work model are included. Industry alone is therefore arguably not the strongest predictor but has a significant influence in combination with other factors such as the work model in which the participants operate.

Further results consist in the consideration of **age** and **gender**. The correlation between the age of the participants and perceived leadership communication is almost zero (-0.016) and therefore not significant ($p = 0.436$). This means that there is no statistically significant correlation and therefore no significant influence on of the variable age on perceived leadership communication. The correlation between gender and satisfaction with Leadership Communication is 0.227 and is therefore significant ($p = 0.011$). This shows a weak positive correlation between gender and satisfaction. However, it is important to note that the correlation is relatively low, suggesting that gender has only a limited influence on the perception of leadership communication.

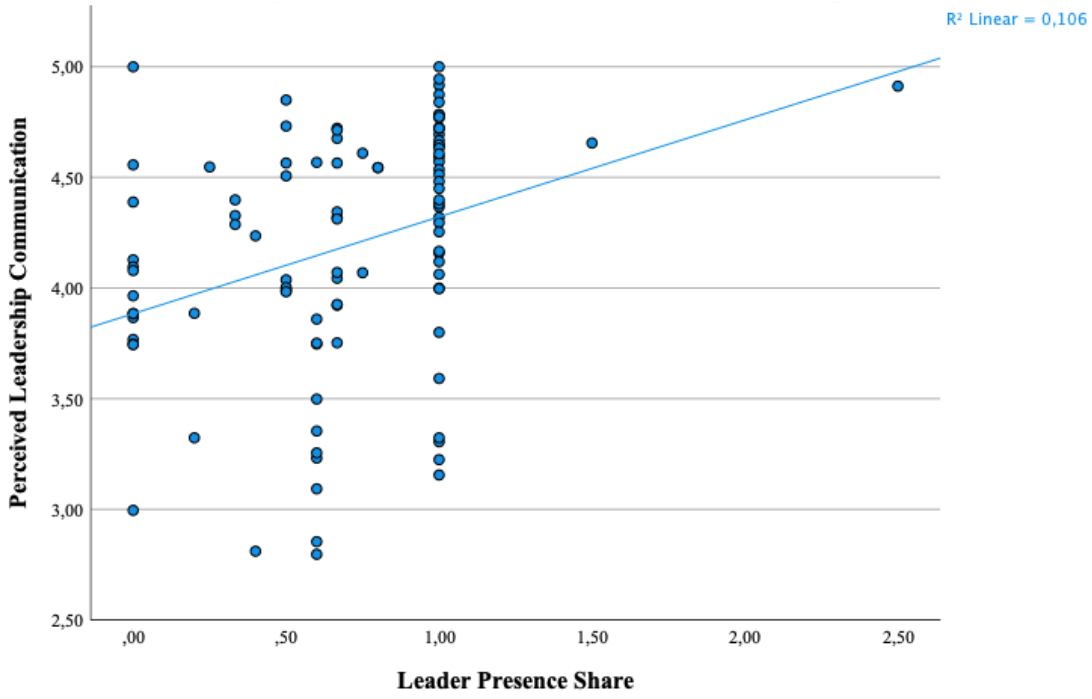
Similar results can be seen regarding the **position** and **length of service**. The correlation between the position in the company and perceived leadership communication amounts to -0.110 and thus shows a very weak negative correlation. This means that higher positions in

the company tend to be associated with a slightly lower perception of leadership communication. This indicates that the position of the employee has very little or no influence on the perception of leadership communication and can therefore be considered statistically not significant. The correlation between the length of service at the organization and the perception of leadership communication measures -0.059 and is therefore not significant ($p = 0.276$). This implies that there is no statistically significant correlation between the length of time with the company and the perception of leadership communication and therefore no significant influence.

Finally, the **presence of leaders** shows a moderate positive correlation with the perception of leadership communication ($r = 0.326$), which indicates that a higher rating of the presence of leaders is associated with a better perception of leadership communication.

Figure 9

The Impact of Leader Presence on PLC



The scatter plot illustrates the relationship between the share of leadership presence and perceived leadership communication. The data points in the plot represent individual responses and show how a leader's presence correlates with employees' perceptions of leadership communication effectiveness. The overall trend, indicated by the rising regression

line, suggests a positive relationship between leader presence and perceived leadership communication. The higher the proportion of leadership presence, the more likely leadership communication is perceived to be better. This trend is visually underlined by the regression line rising across the graph, indicating that a higher level of leader presence is associated with a more favorable perception of leadership communication. The ANOVA confirms the significance of the overall model ($F = 15.763$, $p < 0.001$), which indicates that the work models together with the presence of the leader have a significant influence on the perception of leadership communication. The differences in the median values and the distribution of perceptions between the work models, as shown in the boxplot (Figure x), correspond with the results of the ANOVA.

However, the distribution of the data points shows significant variations around the regression line. This dispersion suggests that factors other than the presence of the leader may play an important role in the perception of leadership communication. The presence of some outliers, particularly at the extreme ends of the leadership presence percentage, also illustrates the variability in the perception of leadership communication, even with similar levels of leadership presence. Overall, the plot shows that while leader presence has a positive influence on perceived leadership communication, it is not the only influencing factor, and that its impact, while positive, may be modest compared to other factors that were not measured.

In order to answer the sub-question SQ3, two open questions were asked during the online survey, determining the **characteristics and qualities of effective leadership communication**. The frequencies of the answers were determined and categorized. The categories identified (Table 12) and the frequencies of the assigned statements provide a more general insight into what employees in different work models consider to be relevant regarding communication with their leader.

Table 15

Characteristics and Qualities of Effective Leadership Communication

Category	Hybrid		Remote	On-Site
	On-site	*Remote*		
Clarity and Transparency	18	10	4	12
Interpersonal Exchange	10	1	0	8
Leader Presence	9	1	0	8
Accessibility On Site	8	0	0	4
Motivation	4	2	0	0
Feedback	3	2	1	1
Empathy	3	2	0	1
Reachability	1	12	3	4
Regular Exchange	1	8	2	1
Trust	1	3	6	1
Flexibility	1	3	0	0
Technical Aspects	0	12	1	0
Efficiency	0	8	6	1
Reliability	0	2	0	0
Other Aspects	3	2	6	3

The results reveal that the different work models emphasize different key features and characteristics of leadership communication. In the on-site share of the hybrid work model, transparency and clarity, interpersonal exchange as well as leader presence and the accessibility of leaders were emphasized as focal points. With regard to transparency and clarity, the focus was on clear objectives, established structures, and processes as well as open and unambiguous communication. In the remote-share, clarity and transparency, reachability and technical aspects are mentioned as important topics. In the remote work model, efficiency, trust and clarity and transparency are mentioned as important qualities. The participants placed particular importance on trust-based communication that is efficiently organized in order to overcome the challenges of physical distance. Transparency and accessibility were also considered important in this model but were less emphasized than in the hybrid setting. For the on-site work model, clarity and transparency as well as interpersonal exchange and leader presence were mentioned as crucial factors. The physical presence and their accessibility were highlighted as important features that support direct contact and interaction on site.

Overall, the results suggest that transparency and clarity are seen as a key aspect of leadership communication across all work models, with this being emphasized most strongly in the hybrid model. Accessibility and interpersonal exchange are also important factors, especially in the remote part of the hybrid model. In the remote model, trust and efficiency are particularly important, suggesting that in the absence of physical presence, other qualities of leadership communication become more crucial. Leadership presence and interpersonal exchange are more important in the on-site model, which emphasizes the importance of physical presence and face-to-face communication.

Summarizing the above-presented results, the quantitative research of this thesis reveals four key findings. First, the hybrid work model, with three days on-site and two days remote, is the most commonly used model in both the luxury and chemical industries. In the luxury industry, the on-site model is more important, while the remote model is more frequently represented in the chemical industry.

Second, leadership communication is generally perceived positively across all work models, with the hybrid model receiving the highest ratings in both industries, followed by the remote work model. The on-site work model receives the lowest ratings, particularly in the chemical industry, where it performs worse than in the luxury industry.

Third, there is a significant influence of the work model on perceived leadership communication. The hybrid model correlates strongly positively with better perceptions, while the on-site model correlates negatively. There are no significant differences regarding age, position, or length of service, but the presence of the leader has a moderately positive influence. In terms of industry, the analysis shows that, as an isolated factor, industry does not have a significant impact on the perception of leadership communication. However, a significant interaction between industry and work model occurs, meaning that the perception of leadership communication varies between industries when the work model is considered.

Fourth, the focus of leadership communication varies depending on the work model. In the hybrid model, clarity and transparency, interpersonal exchange, and leader presence are important in the on-site portion, while in the remote portion, accessibility, technical aspects, and clarity and transparency take precedence. In the pure remote model, efficiency, trust,

and transparency are critical, while in the pure on-site model, clarity and transparency, interpersonal exchange, and leader presence dominate.

6.2 Qualitative Results

Based on the 15 conducted qualitative interviews with employees and leaders about effective leadership communication in contemporary work environments, this study was able to identify meaningful results, which are presented in the following chapter. The findings are presented along four overarching categories, which imply (1) key factors of effective leadership communication, (2) communication challenges, (3) communication tools and technology, and (4) future focal points and leadership competencies.

6.2.1 Employee Perceptions on Leadership Communication

The interviews conducted show that leadership communication is generally perceived as important and essential. This opinion was held by five out of seven of the employees interviewed and six out of seven of the leaders interviewed. Furthermore, six out of seven employees are of the opinion that a strategic approach is pursued, while six out of seven leaders state that their leadership communication is strategically planned.

Looking at the above-mentioned **key factors of effective leadership communication**, it becomes clear that different priorities are set in the different work models and industries. In the on-site work model, presence is considered particularly important, which is linked to the establishment of a personal dimension. One participant outlines in this regard:“ [...] For me, personally, it is crucial that my leader is accessible, also in terms of physical presence. That’s what I would consider the most important thing for me. Because it is the only way in which a personal relationship can be developed.“ (#06, Appendix D.6, line 61, Accountant). The participant also mentions the collaboration on site as well as the open communication that is enabled in this work environment:

> *“In a meeting room, face-to-face, sitting on a table together, that’s when I have the feeling that I can talk openly. Especially when there’s a virtual wall between us on many days of the week, getting together, sharing thoughts and ideas, talking openly, makes a big difference for me to keep the connection up.“* (#06, Appendix D.6, line 71, Accountant).

Furthermore, it can be seen that physical presence was only cited as a significant factor by on-site workers and only by workers within the luxury industry.

In the remote work environment, efficiency was recognized as particularly important. It was emphasized that fewer distractions exist in a remote work environment that occupy working time. On this basis, it is stated that work can generally be completed in less time, which increases the overall efficiency. With regard to on-site work and communication with colleagues, the following is stated:

> *" […] You might not work as much in a day because you chat with one colleague or another. But fundamentally, if the scope of work remains the same, you work just as much, only more efficiently."* (#03, Appendix D.3, line 186, Payroll Accountant).

Another factor that is mentioned in the remote work environment is trust. This aspect is mentioned in connection with autonomous working.

> *"It also partly depends on trust and knowledge, right? If my supervisor had too much insight into my area of work, she would probably get more involved.",* (#03, Appendix D.3, line 35, Payroll Accountant).

This illustrates an unwanted interference by the leader, based on the aspect of trust in good work performance. However, efficiency was only cited as a significant factor by remote workers and only by workers employed in the chemical industry.

In the hybrid work model, clarity and transparency as well as reachability are seen as particularly important. With regard to clarity and transparency, openness, clear responsibilities, and a transparent work environment are cited as indispensable. One participant outlines in this regard:

> "[…] *In a setting where we're not always physically in the same place, it's crucial that everyone knows what's expected of them, and that our leader creates a transparent environment."* (#07, line 51, Project Manager Visual Merchandising).

This not only emphasizes the importance of a fundamentally open and transparent work environment, but also highlights the role of the leader in providing this work environment.

> *"[…] Without clear and frequent communication from our leaders, our work would lack direction, and that would definitely impact our effectiveness. […]",* (#07, Appendix D.7, line 28, Project Manager Visual Merchandising).

Another aspect that was mentioned in the hybrid work model was integration and individual consideration.

> *"[...] I think it's also important that a leader keeps an eye on that and isn't just focused on business, business, business. Instead, she should look into the team itself and see what personalities are in the team, what they need, and adapt a bit to the team and not just work in a way that suits her."* (#5, line 95, Digital Marketing Manager)

In the hybrid as well as the on-site work model, reachability is seen as an important factor in both on a personal and a virtual level. One participant says:

> *"[...] Personally, as an employee, I value that my leader is available when I need them – that they are reachable. [...] Whether this is face-to-face, via phone, Webex, or another method, I'm quite open to it. It's probably also a matter of personal preference."* (#04, Appendix D.4, line 91, Bargaining Specialist).

In the opinion of another participant, reachability is particularly important when working from home.

> *"[...] If there's an important issue or if I need immediate support, then it's quite annoying if you have to wait for an hour or more and literally can't continue your tasks. [...]"* (#07, Appendix D.7, line 54, Project Manager Visual Merchandising).

In addition to the factors outlined above, the aspects of frequency and presence were also mentioned as additional focal points. Frequency consists of frequent communication between the supervisor and the employee while presence relates to the physical presence of the leader.

Further insights regarding the key aspects emerge out of the assessments of effective leadership communication practices by Newman and Ford (2021). The responses reveal that factors such as Responsiveness, Communication Clarity, and Technological Foundations are generally considered important in all work models. Communication Mode is also mainly seen as an important factor, with one exception in the on-site work model. Differentiated views emerge with regard to Frequency and Predictability.

The frequency of communication is stated to be an important aspect in both the on-site and hybrid work models, both in the execution of daily work and with regard to the interpersonal level.

> *"Regular communication is key. It helps to maintain a connection within the team and ensures that we're all aligned. Even if it's just a quick daily check-in, it can make a big difference and reduce boundaries. […]",* (#07, Appendix D.7, line 74, Project Manager Visual Merchandising).

Moreover, the importance for the efficient execution of work is emphasized:

> *"It is important because I prefer to resolve issues quickly rather than waiting until I can reach someone*." (#02, Appendix D.2, line 49, Compensation Specialist).

Three participants, two of whom work in the hybrid work model and one in the remote work model, consider the communication frequency to be less important. This is justified by the need to carry out the work as efficiently as possible:

> *„We don't necessarily need daily exchanges to perform our work effectively.* (#04, line 117, Bargaining Specialist).

Furthermore, it becomes clear that there is a difference in the perception of importance with regard to the industries. Participants from the luxury industry perceive frequency as important, while participants from the chemical industry prioritize the idea of efficiency and therefore attach less importance to the communication with their leader.

The second aspect that shows differences between perceptions is the predictability of communication. Here it becomes clear that the predictability is generally perceived as important by remote workers, while the opinions of on-site and hybrid workers are divided.

> *"It's important. From my perspective, it's important to be able to connect when needed. […]"* (#04, Appendix D.4, line 119, Bargaining Specialist).

This is justified by the characteristics of remote work, in particular the lack of opportunity for spontaneous communication.

> *"[…] Particularly when not on-site, where one might accidentally encounter someone or go next door to the office for a brief exchange on a specific topic, even if it was unplanned, these spontaneous opportunities are lost. In remote work, more planning is required. […]",* (#01, Appendix D.1, line 71, HR Specialist).

Participants from the on-site and hybrid work model do not see any advantage in the predictability of communication.

> *"While I generally appreciate structure and our weekly meeting, I think there's value in keeping some aspects of communication spontaneous*." (#07, Appendix D.7, line 81, Project Manager Visual Merchandising).

This is justified by the fact that the prediction of communication needs is not always possible.

> *"[...] It comes spontaneously. If something is on my mind, I call; if she needs something from me, she calls. Nothing is planned, it comes as it comes in the workday." ,* (#05, Appendix D.5, line 130, Digital Marketing Manager).

Here, too, a noticeable industry difference becomes visible. While predictability is only considered important by employees in the chemical industry, employees in the luxury industry see this aspect as less important.

Moreover, this research was able to identify several **communication challenges** as perceived by employees. Five main challenges resulted out of the conducted employee interviews. The challenge of availability was one of the most frequently mentioned challenges and occurred in all of the work models, but mostly by hybrid workers. In this context, the decline in joint on-site presence is addressed.

> *"In the past, everyone worked in three or four rooms together, so you could quickly pop over to a colleague and resolve something,"* (#02, Appendix D.2, line 62, Compensation Specialist).

In a virtual environment, however, it can be difficult to gain insight into when the leader is actually available. One participant states in this regard:

> *„[...] That's an issue. Because the "available" and "busy" signs on Teams are not really reflecting what is actually going on and if it's suitable to contact the leader in that moment. This can often lead to delays in getting answers or feedback."* (#07, Appendix D.7, line 110, Project Manager Visual Merchandising).

The challenge of personal interaction is mentioned in the on-site and the remote work model. Interestingly, only two of six codes in this segment come from the remote work environment, in which a lack of personal interaction would have been more likely. The remaining four originate in the on-site work environment. The participants explained this by saying that just because they themselves work in an on-site model, this is not automatically the case for the leader. One participant commented:

> *"The biggest challenge for me personally is the lack of face-to-face interaction. That's something I miss a lot, also while being in the office because as I said earlier, that doesn't mean that everyone else is there too.[…]"* (#06, Appendix D.6, line 118, Accountant).

Participants emphasize in this regard, that a virtual environment cannot compensate for the missing personal component:

> *"[…] Because it is the only way in which a personal relationship can be developed. I feel that [...] communication in teams or through chat or phone calls is always very brief and topic focused. It leaves no room for a simple "Hey, how has your day been so far?" or "Is there anything causing you trouble at the moment? […]"* (#06, Appendix D.6, line 63, Accountant).

Regarding face-to-face communication, it is recognized communication is clearer, which eliminates misunderstandings from the beginning.

> *"[…] In face-to-face meetings, everything is laid out clearly, and there's an opportunity for immediate feedback, which simplifies the whole process."* (#06, Appendix D.6, line 142, Accountant).

Moreover, the lack of clarity and transparency in communication was perceived as a challenge. With the exception of one mention in the on-site work model, clarity and transparency was mentioned four times in the hybrid model. Here, the participants focus primarily on the fact that a lack of clarity and transparency can have a complicating effect on work routines and ultimately on effectiveness.

> *" […] Clear communication is crucial – conveying regulations effectively without making the message so complex that it becomes unclear, leading to misunderstandings or complications. […]"* (#04, line 167, Bargaining Specialist).

The statements show that improved and clearer structures and an increased level of transparency can counteract potential complications. Respondents also mentioned specific possible solutions.

> *"[…] For example, in a previous job, we shared our calendars. So, we could see the appointments of other people. We can't do that in my current job. But it's easy to quickly check your supervisor's calendar to see if it's an important meeting, if you can interrupt, or if you should send a Teams message or wait. That might help provide more transparency."* states a participant (#05, Appendix D.5, line 178, Digital Marketing Manager).

Another challenge concerns the communication channels. This challenge was mentioned four times out of a total of six responses in the hybrid model and once each remotely and on-site. Employees reported difficulties in maintaining an overview of the various communication channels, which led to confusion and inefficient communication. Here, the participants address both the number of communication channels used and their meaningful utilization. With regard to the number of communication channels, one participant said:

> *"[...] It's easy to get overwhelmed when you're juggling emails, Teams messages, phone calls, WhatsApp messages. It often ends in confusion or leads to situations where important information is missed or delayed because it was sent through the wrong medium. [...]"* (#07, Appendix D.7, line 116, Project Manager Visual Merchandising).

At the same time, the basic discussion of topics on a purely written level can also lead to challenges.

> *"It's always a sender-receiver issue. It can be challenging to clearly communicate with your leader on a written basis [...], it's important to avoid confusion."* (#04, Appendix D.4, line 165, Bargaining Specialist).

Another challenge that was stated multiple times is the maintaining of efficiency and the functioning of information dissemination. This challenge is mentioned in all three work models. The answers focus on the one hand on the structure for efficient information transfer and on the other hand on the topic of onboarding new employees. The participants stated that the meaningful transfer of information can be more difficult when communicating between different work models and in different communication channels.

> *"And that causes a lack of structure and common understanding, too. Where can I find which type of information? Was there an agreement over a different channel and did I simply miss out on it? My leader was only accessible through WhatsApp yesterday, is that the case today, too? [...]"* (#06, Appendix D.6, line 137, Accountant).

If this information transfer does not work, this can in turn lead to inefficient work processes, as one participant confirms:

> *"[...] Or where what was agreed upon becomes irrelevant after six months, and you have to start the discussion anew. [...]"* (#04, Appendix D.4, line 188, Bargaining Specialist).

Regarding new employees, the onboarding process in a virtual environment is rated as particularly difficult:

> *"[…] A challenge arises with new employees and onboarding. For someone who is new, it is beneficial if the team is on-site, as new employees can better understand how the organization functions and how processes work, which can be more difficult remotely."* (#01, Appendix D.1, line 78, HR Specialist).

The statements make clear, that efficiency is mainly mentioned as important in the chemical industry, whereas employees out the luxury industry don't perceive it as an essential challenge.

Other challenges with only one mention were frequency and consistency in communication. Participants noted that communication frequency of communication tends to decrease in a virtual environment while the lack of consistency refers to inconsistent communication processes, which lead to confusion and misunderstandings.

Looking at how the perceived challenges affect the effectiveness of leadership communication based on the statements made, it becomes clear that the challenges mentioned are closely interlinked and mutually influence each other and thus also have an impact on the general effectiveness of communication. A lack of clarity and transparency, coupled with a lack of accessibility to the leader, are described to lead to misunderstandings and confusion, especially in virtual communication. Moreover, it can cause a negative impact on efficiency and structure due to the variety of communication channels. Efficiency and functioning information dissemination, on the other hand, creates the framework within which communication mode and technology can be used effectively to convey information clearly and transparently. At the same time, personal interaction is essential to build trust and enable open and direct communication, which often cannot be achieved through technological channels alone. Accordingly, an additional lack of personal interaction due to a lack of accessibility of the leader can have a negative impact not only on efficiency, but also on the clarity and transparency of communication.

Regarding the industrial comparison, it becomes apparent that all presented challenges have been mentioned both in the luxury and the chemical industry. The aspects of Clarity and Transparency, Availability and Communication Mode and Technology were relatively

balanced in their mentions in the industries. However, Personal interaction was mentioned significantly more often as a challenge in the luxury industry, while Efficiency and Information Dissemination were cited more frequently in the chemical industry.

In terms of the **communication tools and technology** used for leadership communication, MS Teams is the most frequently used tool in all work models. Nevertheless, the use of the communication tool is stated to be different depending on the work environment.

> *"I actually use Microsoft Teams less when I'm on-site because I can usually see my colleagues directly. However, for hybrid work, Microsoft Teams is the primary communication tool, aside from email, which is essential at all locations and for all job functions."* (#4, Appendix D.4, line 238, Collective Bargaining).

This is followed by e-mail and personal interaction. Phone calls and WhatsApp messages were also mentioned but are mainly seen as an important tool for communication in the luxury industry. In the chemical industry, Webex is still cited as a common form of communication.

With regard to the **future focal points and leadership competences**, employees cite efficiency and information dissemination, innovation, and technological education as the main points. Comments on efficiency and information dissemination particularly emphasize the difficulty of sharing information virtually, especially with new employees, and the negative impact on effectiveness (#01, line 163-166, HR Specialist; #02, line 136, Compensation Specialist). Innovation is cited as an important factor in the further development of existing technologies and the evolution of new technologies.

> *"[…] artificial intelligence, the Metaverse, and other innovations will likely come into play later. Many people are already working on that."* (#05, Appendix D.5, line 250, Digital Marketing Manager).

Technological education refers to the ability to use existing technologies sensibly and efficiently and thus to create clear communication structures.

> *"[…] For example, there should be workshops to further educate oneself on how to provide what employees and teams need, regardless of where they are. So, what channels can I use? How regularly should I communicate?"* (#05, Appendix D.5, line 245, Digital Marketing Manager).

Regarding future leadership competences, employees see presence and accessibility, integration and individual consideration, trust, and flexibility as the main leadership competences. Presence and accessibility are mentioned in all work models. Here, employees emphasize the continued importance of being able to meet the leader in person and that the leader is also approachable, especially against the backdrop of different work models (#02, Appendix D.2, line 103, Compensation Specialist; #06, Appendix D.6, line 40, Accountant).

Integration and individual consideration are also cited as important focal points for leaders. Responding to the needs of each individual is particularly important, as is individual consultation of each employee (#01, Appendix D.1, line 110, HR Specialist; #07, Appendix D.7, line 156, Project Manager Visual Merchandising). Trust refers to the relationship of trust between employees and leaders, which gives employees security, conveys support and creates a feeling of integration (#06, Appendix D.6, line 198, Accountant). Another leadership competence is Flexibility, which emphasizes openness towards different work models, as well as the confidence that communication can work in different ways (#05, Appendix D.5, line 257, Digital Marketing Manager) Personal Interaction, Consistency, Clarity and Transparency are also mentioned less frequently.

Looking at the industrial focal points, integration and individual consideration as well as presence and accessibility are relevant for the luxury and chemical industries. Efficiency and information dissemination is only named as a future focal point in the chemical industry. Technological Education, on the other hand, is an important topic for the luxury industry. Flexibility and trust are also relevant to the luxury industry.

Summarizing the above-presented results, the first result consists in differences in perceived key factors of effective communication between the work models. In the on-site work model, presence, availability, and personal interaction play the biggest role. Employees prefer direct contact with leaders, expect good accessibility both virtually and on site and place a high value on building personal relationships. In the remote work model, efficiency and trust in autonomous working take on a key role. Remote employees emphasize fewer distractions, greater efficiency, and trust in the autonomous execution of their work are important. In the hybrid model, clarity and transparency, accessibility of the leader and integration and individual consideration are particularly crucial. This includes a structured approach to communication, good accessibility, and the inclusion of the needs of each individual in order

to avoid misunderstandings and enable effective communication. The practices derived from the literature show that responsiveness, communication clarity and technological foundations are viewed important in all work models. The frequency of communication, on the other hand, is relevant in the on-site work model and the hybrid work model, while predictability is considered more important in the remote work model.

The second result consists of differences in perceived challenges depending on the work model. In the hybrid model, the availability of the leader and the clarity and transparency of communication are the main challenges. In particular, the limited insight into availability and the complexity of communication, which requires clear structures and communication channels to ensure the effectiveness of communication. In the on-site and remote work model, personal interaction is perceived as a challenge, whereby the lack of a personal component and the avoidance of misunderstandings in face-to-face communication are emphasized. All work models perceive challenges with regard to communication mode and technology for as well as efficiency and information dissemination, which includes the choice of the right mode and its number and the efficient and structured dissemination of information.

The third finding lies in differences in perceptions between the two industries. The luxury industry values personal interaction, informal communication and building close relationships within the team. Clarity and transparency are also crucial, with the personal presence of leaders playing a central role. Topics such as team dynamics and personal relationships are emphasized more strongly than in the chemical industry. This is supported by a focus on tools enhancing the personal aspect such as phone calls and WhatsApp messages. The chemical industry prefers efficiency, trust, and autonomous working methods. Remote employees from the chemical industry see efficiency and the avoidance of unnecessary communication as crucial. Personal interaction plays a smaller role than in the luxury industry, while technological education and the efficient use of communication channels are viewed important. Here, besides Microsoft Teams, Webex still plays in important role.

The fourth result consists of future focal points and leadership competences that employees consider to be central. Efficiency and Information Dissemination, Innovation and Technological Education are central focal points. Presence and accessibility, integration and

individual consideration, trust and flexibility are perceived as important leadership competences.

6.2.2 Leader Assessments

A total of eight leaders were interviewed, three of whom work in the chemical industry and five in the luxury industry. Six of the interviewed leaders work in a hybrid work model themselves, while two leaders work full-time on-site. Seven of the interviewed leaders consider leadership communication to be particularly important, while one leader recognizes the importance of communication, but does not consider the availability of a leader for permanent communication with employees to be feasible (#09, Appendix E.2, line 23, Head of HR). Seven out of eight leaders also pursue a strategic approach when communicating with their employees, while one leader implements the exchange unplanned and spontaneously (#08, Appendix E.1, line 98, Head of Research).

For a general assessment of communication by leaders, the **key factors of effective leadership communication** are considered. The most frequently mentioned factors are integration and individual consideration, clarity and transparency and personal interaction.
Integration and individual consideration are mentioned most frequently of all factors. Individual consideration for each individual employee is seen as the basis for the development of strategic communication.

> *"[...] I've never worked within a predefined framework, which might be sensible in some cases. Instead, I've built structures based on the individuals involved. […]"* (#11, Appendix E.4, line 88, CEO).

It is emphasized that individual factors are at the forefront of both the choice of work model and communication with the employee, which must also be addressed in a personalized manner.

> *"[...] From my experience, it also depends on the individual employee* (#08, Appendix E.1, line 63, Head of Research).

However, this is only possible if there is interaction with the employees that allows this assessment, emphasizes the Head of Research:

> *"Yes, definitely. It is mandatory for a leader being able to assess individual aspects and engage with employees in a way that allows for an accurate evaluation and establishes a trust-based relationship."* (#08, Appendix E.1, line 82, Head of Research).

However, it is also described as important to integrate all employees, whether on site or virtually.

> *"[…] Ensuring that everyone feels integrated is crucial. This is, of course, not always easy because the teams are sometimes smaller, and when you're working in pairs, it's more challenging to feel a sense of belonging. […]"* (#09, Appendix E.2, line 83, Head of HR).

This is described as fundamental, especially in times of change.

> *[…] Selling change is difficult because it's a very personal matter. You really have to adapt to each individual, even more than in normal leadership, I think."* (#14, Appendix E.7, line 81, Head of Commercial).

Clarity and transparency in communication is considered fundamental, particularly for the remote working part of the workforce.

> *"[…] My number one rule in leadership when you have many remote employees or even just remote employees, is truly open communication. Distance can create barriers and sensitivities that creep in without ill intent, and you need to strategically work on eliminating those from time to time."* (#14, Appendix E.7, line 58, Head of Commercial).

It is emphasized that precise communication is necessary in order to guarantee smooth work processes (#13, Appendix E.6, line 35, Head of Marketing). However, the creation of a transparent environment is also seen as necessary in order to be able to organize collaboration effectively in a virtual environment.

> *"[…] And transparency is crucial as well, such as being able to see colleagues' calendars, so my colleague can see my calendar and know whether I am currently in a meeting or just unavailable. […]"* (#08, Appendix E.1, line 44, Head of Research).

The third aspect is personal interaction. Although the importance of personal interaction on a professional level is also mentioned here, the focus is placed on informal personal interaction and the effects that this interaction can have.

> *"[…] So, while precise and fact-based communication is crucial, it's also important to have casual interactions, like chatting by the coffee machine about how your weekend was. […]"* (#13, Appendix E.6, line 48, Head of Marketing, line).

In particular, she emphasizes the impact on team dynamics.

> *"Therefore, maintaining these informal communication lines, which may sometimes seem like just casual chats during lunch, is crucial for team cohesion. Many people think that they are wasting work time, but in reality, it's team building. So, it's a vital component."* (#13, Appendix E.6, line 70, Head of Marketing)

The fourth aspect is presence and accessibility. In contrast to the personal exchange mentioned above, the focus here is on the presence of the leader, both on-site and remotely.

> *" […] It's crucial to remain active, present, and approachable as a leader, even if you are not physically in the same room."* (#13, Appendix E.6, line 124, Head of Marketing, line).

The Retail Manager at LVMH shares the same opinion and underlines the importance of paying attention to employees:

> *"Even if it's just a quick "Good morning, happy Friday, are you satisfied with your week, ready for the weekend, remember to leave a bit earlier today." It's about signaling that you are present, that you are not someone who only checks in every two weeks in a critical manner, but rather that you are an active part of their work life, whether you are physically present or not."* (#12, Appendix E.5, line 31, Head of Retail).

While the luxury industry is of the opinion that this works best on a physically personal level, it can also be achieved through technological means.

> *"[…] For example, having a Teams channel where you can quickly ask a question. This somewhat mirrors the idea of "stopping by the office briefly and asking something." I think that's definitely important."* (#08, Appendix E.1, line 41, Head of Research line).

Also mentioned were motivation and support, communication channels and technological foundations, efficiency, frequency, and trust. Motivation and support are described as fundamental to the relationship between leaders and employees and includes celebrating

successes, joint activities outside of work or team meetings (#09, Appendix E.2, line 82, Head of HR; #12, Appendix E.5, line 100, Head of Retail; #13, Appendix E.6, line 64, Head of Marketing). Statements relating to communication channels and technological foundations address the tools used for communicative collaboration. The focus here lies on both verbal communication and technical communication (#15, Appendix E.8, line 35, Managing Director). Functioning tools that enable efficient digital communication are also described as fundamental (#09, Appendix E.2, line 183, Head of HR). Efficiency is considered important both in terms of direct and concise communication (#12, line 74, Head of Retail) and in terms of efficiency with regard to hybrid working (#08, Appendix E.1, line 51, Head of Research). Frequency is cited as an important factor for maintaining the exchange with employees, for the ongoing sharing of information and for permanent feedback (#08, Appendix E.1, line 34, Head of Research; #9, Appendix E.2, line 81, Head of Human Resources; #13, Appendix E.6, line 106, Head of Marketing). Trust refers both to the trust that employees will carry out their work diligently, regardless of the work model (#13, Appendix E.6, line 97, Head of Marketing), and to the mutual trust between employees and leaders in the sense of a trust relationship (#08, Appendix E.1, line 60, Head of Human Resources). In addition to these responses, there are other less frequent mentions such as fairness, empathy and consistency, timely communication, and preparation.

Looking at industrial differences, it becomes clear that integration and individual consideration as well as presence and accessibility are viewed important in both industries. Clarity and transparency as well as personal interaction are key factors that can be assigned more to the luxury industry.

The most frequently mentioned **communication challenges** perceived by leaders are the lack of personal interaction, communication mode and technology, and efficiency and information dissemination.

A lack of personal interaction is mentioned by far the most commonly and its significance is highlighted through the challenges that virtual communication contain.

> "*When you share a document and present, you can no longer see the others. And when presenting without seeing how others are reacting, you don't know if they understood, if they look skeptical, or if everyone is nodding along. Essentially, from my perspective, it's more difficult and less effective because it's a one-way*

communication rather than a give-and-take.[…]" (#10, Appendix E.3, line 100, CEO).

Hybrid meetings, in particular, are seen as difficult because they are unfavorable for those who are not present (#09, Appendix E.2, line 151, Head of HR; #10, Appendix E.3, line 86, CEO). With regard to the general effects of a lack of personal interaction, the LVMH Marketing Manager emphasizes:

> *"We observed that the team dynamic suffered when people didn't see each other due to varying in-office days. The sense of cohesion and team spirit was affected, and communication stalled."* (#13, Appendix E.6, line 46, Head of Marketing).

Moreover, multitasking is mentioned as an influencing factor that makes personal interaction even more difficult due to constant availability.

> *"[…] I've actually instituted a phone ban during in-person meetings because I find it annoying when everyone is constantly multitasking. I've seen this with my own leader – only half of what's said is understood. […]"* (#12, Appendix E.5, line 77, Head of Retail).

The second most frequently mentioned aspect is communication mode and technology. Regarding the number of channels used the General Manager of LVMH notes:

> *"[…] The second issue is with communication tools, as these have multiplied exponentially in the business world. Ten years ago, you only had a few tools: phone or email, maybe three if you count mail or fax. And these were somewhat time-delayed: a phone call was immediate, email gave you about 12 hours, and with fax or letters, you had a week. The rules were more or less clear. Today, you still have mail, faxes are not gone but used less, you have the phone, emails, and chats—each with different levels because different tools are used. […]* (#15, Appendix E.8, line 90, Managing Director).

In terms of the effective use, it is emphasized that although many channels have been implemented, employees have never learned to use them sensibly.

> *"Many communication channels have just come up and been used without necessarily learning how to use them correctly. For example, you shouldn't send a Teams message, then an email, and then something else, only to follow up with a phone call to address the same topic. The issue of training is a good point here—raising awareness among people about which tools to use and for what purpose."* (#15, Appendix E.8, line 101, Managing Director).

Moreover, limitations of tools are pointed out, which cannot map a natural communication setup. The CEO of Kaimann highlights the problem of not being able to see the participants when sharing files in online meetings:

> *"When you share a document and present, you can no longer see the others. And when presenting without seeing how others are reacting, you don't know if they understood, if they look skeptical, or if everyone is nodding along. […]"* (#10, Appendix E.3, line 100, CEO).

The time delays in meetings are also discussed, which lead to several people speaking at the same time and hinder the natural flow of conversation (#08, line 90, Head of Research). The Head of Human Resources at BASF also addresses the problem of meetings and emphasizes the lack of interaction in mass calls such as townhall meetings (#09, line 243, Head of HR).

The last factor of efficiency and information dissemination includes the challenge of communicating efficiently and disseminating information to all employees in a sensible way. The General Manager of LVMH points out that there are unnecessary communication loops because communication takes place through too many different channels.

> *„The first is that with the different models—virtual and physical—you sometimes get the impression that you're repeating things or forgetting them. This leads to a model of over-communication, where you might have already covered something virtually, but it comes up again in person or in writing. This results in some redundant communication to ensure the message gets through […]"* (#15, Appendix E.8, line 86, Managing Director).

Moreover, information can be lost due to a lack of personal interaction.

> *"I do think it's definitely different now because some information gets lost due to the absence of incidental contacts. When people used to run into each other, they would have a conversation, and suddenly an idea would come up*." (#08, Appendix E.1, line 195, Head of Research).

Moreover, working in different work models is also mentioned as an aspect that can lead to a loss of information.

> *"And those who are not physically present don't easily pick up on this. Remote workers rely on significantly fewer channels.[…]"* (#10, Appendix E.3, line 186, CEO).

Other factors mentioned were structure and consistency, presence, engagement, and organizational factors. Structure and consistency address the challenge of maintaining an overview and communication structure in the various work environments (#08, Appendix E.1, line 99, Head of Research). Presence refers to the joint presence on site (e.g., #09, Appendix E.2, line 106, Head of HR; #10, Appendix E.3, line 86, CEO). Engagement describes factors such as the attention span of employees and not only dialing into calls, but also actually being involved (e.g., #10, Appendix E.3, line 110, CEO; #12, Appendix E.5, line 127, Head of Retail). Organizational factors include aspects such as actual working hours and availability in remote work models or conflicts regarding the organization of work (e.g., #08, Appendix E.1, line 139, Head of Research; #10, Appendix E.3, line 178, CEO). Other factors that were mentioned, but only sporadically, were Transparency and Clarity, Reachability, Motivation, Creativity, Frequency, and Individual Consideration.

In terms of the use of **communication tools and technology**, leaders, too, outline the importance of MS teams for leadership communication purposes.

> *"Yes, and for personal interaction, we also use tools like MS Teams chats. Sending a smiley, sharing a picture, and exchanging informal information, both professional and personal, enhances communication from both sides."* (#09, Appendix E.2, line 126, Head of Human Resources).

E-Mail is, aligned with the employee perceptions, viewed as the second most important tool. WhatsApp and phone calls are mentioned as a frequently used tool by leaders of the luxury industry while the chemical industry recently implemented AI tools for communication purposes, that offer chat functions.

> *"We started with WebEx and Java, which was a kind of chat program, and then switched to Teams during COVID. Now we have implemented a ChatGPT version called BASF-Chat, so new tools are continually being added and old ones are sometimes phased out. This is constantly evaluated, but it's the IT colleagues who handle it for us and roll it out globally."* (#08, Appendix E.1, line 210, Head of Research).

With regard to **future focal points and leadership competences**, the most frequently mentioned factors in the area of future developments are development and structure of work, technological education, and innovation. With regard to developments and structure of work, the leaders address the anticipated developments of the work models.

> *"I don't think the requirement for office presence will ever disappear, at least for two days a week. […]"* (#12, Appendix E.5, line 283, Head of Retail).

However, she believes that a complete return to office work is unlikely and would be an obstacle for the industry:

> *"[…]There will continue to be remote work; 100% office presence will never return. Otherwise, you wouldn't be competitive, especially compared to other brands. If an employee values that, they will go elsewhere. […]"* (#12, Appendix E.5, line 304, Head of Retail).

Overall, the hybrid work model is seen as the favored model.

> *" […]However, overall, there are many benefits because employees can better manage their stress. Tasks requiring deep focus can be handled well from home, while tasks needing creativity might benefit from being in the office. I think the mix offers the most advantages."* (#08, Appendix E.1, line 230, Head of Research).

With regard to technological education, the leaders address the aspect previously mentioned in the challenges regarding the need to provide employees with the necessary training for the numerous existing tools in order to ensure efficient and meaningful usage. The Marketing Manager from LVMH comments on this*:*

> *" […] There are definitely many people who use this channel somewhat excessively, and with the rapid adoption of Teams when COVID hit, not everyone really learned how to manage it properly. They were just thrilled to have it and used it extensively, and now they're slowly developing an awareness of where they need to filter, and when to assign different priorities, such as deciding if it's really necessary to have a call instead of just sending another email. […]"* (#13, Appendix E.6, line 167, Head of Marketing).

Innovation relates to the role of new technologies such as ChatGPT or, more generally, artificial intelligence and future communication tools.

> *"I'm sure it will continue to evolve, improve, and become even easier, faster, and more flexible to communicate with increasingly user-friendly tools. Both direct communication and the use of various databases will benefit. I could also see AI playing a role in this. […]"* (#10, Appendix E.3, line 247, CEO).

Looking at the statements regarding future leadership competences, the most frequently mentioned aspects are Inclusive Leading and Individual Consideration, Flexibility and Agility, as well as Pursuing a Vision. Inclusive Leading and Individual Consideration is the

most frequently mentioned factor and refers to the inclusion of employees in the management and communication process and the focus on the individual circumstances of each individual.

> *"[…] I believe that inclusive leadership has become much more important. By this, I mean involving employees more in decision-making processes and making them feel part of the team. It used to be more top-down.[…]"* (#08, Appendix E.1, line 239, Head of Research).

The CEO of Kaimann GmbH also emphasizes the different requirements that employees have and the resulting even greater need for individual consideration.

> *"[…] Some fundamental challenges will probably remain the same, such as how to involve everyone even if they have different technical, mental, or physical conditions, and how to bring them together as a team and steer them in the same direction."* (#10, Appendix E.3, line 254, CEO).

One factor that is emphasized in this context is situational leadership. The Marketing Manager explains this type of leadership as follows:

> *" […] In situational leadership, I need to assess how much support each employee needs, where they need it, and through which channel. It's crucial to remain active, present, and approachable as a leader, even if you are not physically in the same room."* (#13, Appendix E.6, line 122, Head of Marketing).

Flexibility and agility is another frequently mentioned factor.

> *"For me, flexibility and agility are crucial – adapting quickly to new tools, new generations, and new ways of communicating. This adaptability isn't just about technology but also about embracing new styles."* (#15, Appendix E.8, line 160, Managing Director).

This also relates to the acceptance of modern work models.

> *"Looking at the job market, I don't think we can afford to disregard this trend, as we would simply not attract applicants. […] As a leader, you have to provide that flexibility. It's unavoidable."* (#09, Appendix E.2, line 235, Head of HR).

Pursuing a vision when communicating with employees is also seen as a fundamental aspect that will play a more important role in the future. Accordingly, successful leadership communication requires the existence or development of a vision and openness towards

employees (#11, line 193, CEO). According to the CEO of ILUXI, setting goals plays a key role:

> *"[…] Communication is interactive – it's about give and take, and leadership communication involves setting goals and ensuring that all employees contribute towards them. […] "* (#11, Appendix E.4, line 234, CEO).

Other less frequently mentioned factors are frequency of communication, clarity of communication and trust. Being able to communicate frequently as a leader, bringing clarity to communication despite the many communication channels and seeing trust as the basis of communication are cited here (#12, Appendix E.5, line 311, Head of Retail; #11, Appendix E.4, line 239, CEO; #15, Appendix E.4, line 168, Managing Director).

Summarizing the above-presented results, the first result consists of the key factors of effective communication as perceived by leaders. Integration and individual consideration include personalized attention and consideration of the needs of each employee as well as their integration into team and decision-making processes. Another key factor lies in clarity and transparency, which leaders consider to be particularly relevant for remote workers. This means breaking through the virtual barrier of the remote work model through open communication and transparency so that misunderstandings can be avoided, and effective communication is facilitated. Personal interaction is another key factor and emphasizes the importance of communication on a professional as well as on an informal and personal level, which is seen as central to team cohesion and team dynamics. Presence and accessibility represent the final key factor. Leaders should be physically or virtually present and approachable. Regular interactions and the signaling of presence, whether through small personal conversations or virtual tools, are decisive here.

The second result relates to the perceived challenges in leadership communication. One major challenge leader perceive is the lack of face-to-face interaction, as virtual meetings are viewed as less effective and hinder direct exchange and team dynamics. Another challenge is the communication mode and technology aspect. This includes the variety of communication channels and the unstructured and excessive use of these channels, which is attributed to a lack of training and results in confusion and inefficient communication. Efficiency and information dissemination is also seen as a challenge. Leaders reported

excessive communication loops due to the use of multiple channels and the loss of information through a lack of structure and personal interaction.

The third result lies in the industrial differences in the perceptions of leaders. Here too, personal interaction and physical presence are seen as central to team cohesion and motivation in the luxury industry. The luxury industry shows a slight tendency to prefer communication tools with a more personal touch, such as WhatsApp and phone calls. In the chemical industry, efficiency, predictability and autonomous working are prioritized. Clarity and transparency in communication are particularly important, while leaders rely heavily on technological support. Here, besides Microsoft Teams, the chemical industry places a greater emphasis on new technologies and AI. Despite these differences, integration, individual consideration, and the accessibility of leaders are essential for effective communication in both industries.

The fourth result consists of future focal points and leadership competences as perceived by leaders. According to these findings, leaders must show flexibility and agility in order to adapt to new tools, communication styles and ways of working. Inclusive leadership that considers the individual needs of each employee and the pursuit of a clear vision are seen as key aspects.

After the presentation of the results and the summary of the conducted findings, the following table provides an overview of the core findings of this thesis in relation to the research question and its main sub-questions, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Table 16

Summary of Research Questions and Key Findings

Research Question (RQ) / Sub-Questions (SQ)	**Results**
SQ1: *How do employees perceive leadership communication in on-site, remote, and hybrid work models in the German luxury and chemical industries and are there differences in perceptions?*	**Differences in perceptions are visible:** - Hybrid: most positively perceived work model - Remote: work model with moderate perception - On-site: most negatively perceived work model **Overall:** Positive perception of leadership communication

SQ2: *What factors contribute to variations in perceived leadership communication across hybrid, remote, and on-site work models in the German luxury and chemical industry?*	**Variations in key aspects, challenges and focal points between the work models:** **Key factors:** - On-site: Personal interaction, leader presence and availability - Remote: Trust, efficiency and structured processes - Hybrid: Accessibility, individual consideration and integration **Challenges:** - On-site: Lack of personal interaction and leader presence. - Remote: Clarity and transparency and trust issues. - Hybrid: Leader availability, Clarity and Transparency and complexity of communication channels.
SQ3: *What are the main communication challenges faced by employees in each work model, and how do they affect their perceptions of leadership effectiveness?*	**Hybrid:** Availability of the leader and communication clarity. **On-site & Remote:** Personal interaction and avoiding misunderstandings in communication. **All Work Models:** issues with communication mode, technology, and information dissemination.
SQ4: *How do leaders in the German luxury and chemical industry assess communication with employees in different work models and do these approaches align with employee perceptions?*	**Leaders:** clarity, transparency, individual consideration, and presence as key factors for successful communication. **Challenges:** personal interaction, use of communication modes, and maintaining structured information flow. **Future Focus:** on technological education, flexibility, and shared vision in communication.
SQ5: *Are there differences in perceived leadership communication by employees and the perspectives of leaders within the luxury industry compared to the chemical industry?*	**Luxury Industry:** Emphasis on personal interaction and informal communication; face-to-face contact remains vital. **Chemical Industry:** Focus on clarity, efficiency, and structured processes; technological education and efficient channel use are key. **Both Industries:** Share concerns about availability, communication mode choices, and technological barriers.
RQ: *How do hybrid, remote, and on-site work models influence perceived leadership communication within the luxury industry compared to the chemical industry in Germany?*	**Work models have a significant influence on leadership communication perceptions in both industries:** **Hybrid Work:** Is most positively perceived due to a balance of flexibility and personal interaction. **Remote Work** fosters autonomy and trust, but clarity and structured communication are crucial. **On-site Work:** While traditionally valued for in-person interaction, ranks lowest, as the leader's presence often doesn't align with employee expectations.

Chapter 7 – Discussion

The following chapter discusses the key findings regarding the influence of on-site, remote and hybrid work models on leadership communication within the luxury and the chemical industry. The main results are explored in light of the relevant literature, further discussing its implications for leadership practices. Furthermore, the discussion focuses on how leadership communication dynamics are shaped by contemporary work models, drawing attention to both industry-specific factors and broader trends.

Differences in Perceived Leadership Communication Across Work Models

A fundamental outcome of this thesis is the noticeable differences in perceived leadership communication across various work models (see Table 16, concerning research question *SQ1*). This study has successfully highlighted these distinctions, revealing that the hybrid work model is the most positively perceived in terms of leadership communication, followed by remote work, while on-site work is perceived the least favorably.

These findings contradict the results of the recent study by Mikkelson et al. (2023), which found no influence of the work environment on the perception of leader communication competence. One reason for these differing results could consist in the methodological differences between the studies. While Mikkelson et al. (2023) conducted two studies with groups of over 300 participants from various industries, this research focuses specifically on the luxury and chemical sectors. Moreover, the study from Mikkelson et al. (2023) examines communication effectiveness and appropriateness of leaders, emphasizing their influence on positive and negative employee outcomes but does not specifically compare leadership communication across different work models. The absence of identified differences in perceived leadership communication in this study might be due to a lack of focus on the contextual nuances of various work models, an aspect that was examined in more detail in this thesis by analyzing specific factors related to leadership communication in depth.

Several factors may contribute to the positive perception of leadership communication within the hybrid work model. Insights from the literature on various work arrangements provide some possible explanations. One key factor could be that the inherent characteristics of the hybrid model tend to be perceived more favorably overall, independent of specific communication practices, and this positive outlook extends to leadership communication.

For instance, remote work is often linked to challenges like social isolation and reduced well-being (Klopotek 2017, Adams-Prassl et al. 2020) while on-site work is criticized for its lack of flexibility (Popovici & Popovici, 2020). In contrast, hybrid work strikes a balance between these extremes, combining the flexibility of remote work with the personal interaction of on-site work. From a communication standpoint, hybrid work facilitates both scheduled interactions such as virtual or in-person meetings and spontaneous, face-to-face conversations, all of which positively influence how leadership communication is perceived. Additionally, hybrid work offers opportunities for informal social interactions outside of work hours, which employees have identified as important. In this way, hybrid models foster social connections while maintaining the flexibility that modern employees value.

Another possible explanation is the more tailored communication approach enabled by the hybrid work model, which combines both on-site and remote components. It is likely that communication can therefore be more focused and better aligned with the specific needs of individual employees. Leaders are able to utilize in-person presence for strategically important or emotionally charged discussions, while day-to-day operational communication can be handled more efficiently through digital channels. This is also supported by the qualitative results, which imply that meetings are often held on on-site work days. This approach increases the variety of formal and informal communication options, making it both more accessible and easier to implement compared to the remote work model. This intentional separation between personal and operational communication may enhance the effectiveness of leadership communication, which results in a more positive perception by employees.

When examining the overall perception of leadership communication across different work models, discrepancies with previous research become evident. As discussed earlier, remote work has often been depicted in literature as a model that inherently faces poorer communication conditions and an increased risk of social isolation (Klopotek, 2017). Additionally, Guinea et al. (2012) found that virtual teams tend to exhibit lower communication frequency, reduced knowledge sharing, and therefore lower satisfaction levels. However, the findings of this study challenge these assumptions. While leadership communication in the remote work model is indeed perceived less positively than in the hybrid model, both the qualitative and quantitative results indicate that leadership

communication, even in remote settings, is generally viewed positively. Moreover, the qualitative results show greater effectiveness and constant social communication, which is contradicting to Guinea et al. (2012). This suggests that despite the expected limitations of remote work, communication practices have improved, leading to a more favorable overall perception in remote work models than previously assumed.

One possible explanation for this could be, that essential technologies for remote work have evolved significantly in recent years, leading to notable improvements in communication, despite remaining challenges. Many of the obstacles that made remote communication difficult during the pandemic may now have been mitigated through technological advancements, enabling more seamless interactions. This is also reflected in the results regarding applied communication technologies. Microsoft Teams thereby represents a fundamental tool, which combines videocalls, chat functions and data exchange possibilities, which wasn't a commonly used tool before the pandemic. This is in line with the overcome challenge outlined by Gandrita et al. (2022), which regards the successful re-designing process initiated by the global pandemic. The authors state that the initial fear of not being able to carry out specific work tasks from have been overcome, which could also be the case regarding leadership communication in virtual environments. Innovative tools such as cloud platforms, AI-driven communication programs, and enhanced video conferencing systems have made smoother and more reliable communication possible, which represents an aspect that was not as achievable a few years ago. Leaders report already using these tools, which makes it likely that they will become more widespread in the coming years. Moreover, it can be assumed that leaders have adapted better to the remote work environment over time, acquiring necessary digital competencies through both formal training and practical experience. This learning curve has likely enhanced their ability to communicate effectively from a distance, which could, in turn, have improved the overall perception of leadership communication within remote work models.

Considering this development against the background of on-site work, the comparatively lower perceived leadership communication is an unexpected result. In light of the findings of Engelen and Held (2019), which indicate that employees spend half of their time with others, it could have been assumed that this environment provides better communication conditions, as personal communication is enabled.

This discrepancy can be explained by various factors. A possible factor could lie in the basic framework conditions of remote work. For instance, while face-to-face communication provides opportunities for spontaneous interaction and real-time feedback, it may not always guarantee the flexibility and adaptability that modern employees seek. The on-site model, with its physical presence requirement, could be seen as less accommodating of individual needs, such as work-life balance and autonomy, which are highly valued in remote and hybrid setups. The constraints of a fixed physical environment may also limit leaders' ability to adapt their communication to the needs of a diverse workforce that has grown accustomed to the flexibility of digital communication tools.

Another reason could consist in the degree of virtuality in the on-site work model. This study has confirmed that on-site employees and leaders do not necessarily have the same work model and being on-site still means communicating virtually. This contradicts the approach of Purvanova and Bono (2009), who associate more geographically dispersed employees with a greater degree of virtuality and less disperson with a lower degree of virtuality. Due to the varying work environments and constellations created by different work models, employees are required to communicate virtually, regardless of their preferred way of working. However, this may result in employees who generally prefer to work on-site not being able to do so in the way that was common before the rise of hybrid and remote work. Therefore, the relatively poorer perception of leadership communication could be related to the fact that employees do not communicate with their leader in the preferred way because they are working in a different work model or do not have the same share of days on-site. This is supported by the quantitative result, that connects the presence of the leader on on-site days with a more positive perception of leadership communication. On this basis, it can be concluded that the perception of leadership communication is influenced by the characteristics of different working models.

Moreover, this requires communicative exchange with virtual tools. Here, the results are in line with findings from Bloom et al. (2022), which state e-mails as well as chat tools as the most frequently used tools in an on-site environment. Even though face-to-face communication was occasionally mentioned by employees in this study as an important tool for those working on-site, virtual communication plays a more important role, even on days when both employees and leaders are on-site. This makes it clear that virtual communication

is a basis for all employees, regardless of the work model. Nevertheless, it remains clear from both the literature and the results of this study that face-to-face communication is indispensable and will not disappear in the long term. However, on-site work models must adapt to the changed conditions in order to generate targeted and meaningful interaction and collaboration and not limit communication exclusively to virtual exchange.

One interesting aspect that can be discussed in this context is the trend towards open-office and flexible work spaces mentioned in the literature section. The design of the working environment could play a decisive role here in the future, as on-site workplaces are responsible for creating a communicative and interactive environment on the other days when work is actually carried out on site. If employees and leaders are only in the office together for two or three days, closed offices and individual work on these days do not lead to a strengthening of team dynamics and open communication. Creating the connecting spaces mentioned at the beginning of this paper, which can be adapted according to the needs of the employees. This in turn can lead to a more intensive exchange between employees and leaders, which allows for both the formal business topics mentioned above and provides a safe environment for informal communication.

Despite the variation in how communication is perceived across work models, leadership communication was rated positively in all of the work models. This illustrates once again that the categorization of remote work as synonymous with poorer communication and on-site work as synonymous with better communication does not correspond to reality. Each work model is accompanied by specific focal points and challenges, which is the second key finding of this thesis and is discussed below.

Key Factors and Challenges Across Work Models

Another central result of this work is the differing key factors and challenges between the work models with regard to effective leadership communication (see Table 16, concerning the research questions *SQ2* and *SQ3*). The differences identified are partly consistent with the literature, but also highlight additional priorities and new factors that need to be considered.

The general importance of clarity and transparency in communication as well as the availability of the leader are focal points that are also reflected in the practices of Newman

and Ford (2021), who consider them to be fundamental to virtual communication. In particular, the importance of clarity and transparency could be identified in this work, which additionally supports the findings of Hülsheger et al. (2009), who emphasize that a shared understanding of clear goals and tasks is fundamental in a virtual environment This indicates that clarity and transparency continue to play an essential role in leadership communication, even with the emergence of hybrid and decentralised work models. This illustrates that although work environments and tools have evolved, the fundamental need for clear, open communication remains. This persistence emphasises that this aspect represents a universal leadership requirement that remains essential for successful leadership communication in all work models, regardless of changing circumstances.

Even if the general importance of these factors can be confirmed in this research, it must be taken into account that maintaining clarity and transparency is particularly difficult in the hybrid work model, which is why the focus in this context cannot be set exclusively on virtual communication surroundings such as remote work. The fact that this aspect is particularly fundamental for hybrid work and is additionally seen as a challenge may be due to the constantly changing environment that the hybrid model creates. This ties in with the place and time axes of hybrid work mentioned by Gratton (2021). It is likely that if both employees and leaders are time-unconstrained and place-unconstrained, this means that ongoing communication takes place via different means and from different locations. This can make it much more difficult to maintain clear and transparent communication structures, which in turn has a negative impact on the perceived leadership communication between employees and leaders. While permanent communication via technological information technologies takes place in the remote environment, the hybrid work model contains an even greater dynamic in this respect.

Moreover, this research highlighted the relevance of trust and integration as well as individual consideration. These findings align with the key aspects of transformational leadership theory that underscores the importance of trust and individualized consideration in fostering a productive and effective work environment (Bass, 1985). Bass argues, that leaders who prioritize building strong emotional bonds with their employees through trust and personal attention can significantly enhance productivity. The findings of this research

support the continued relevance of these principles in today's work environments, particularly within hybrid and remote work models.

These results lead to the assumption that despite technological progress and the availability of new communication tools, purely efficiency orientated communication strategies are insufficient and do not lead to a more positive perception of leadership communication. Trust and individualized attention remain essential components, even in modern, digital work contexts. Nevertheless, it has to be taken into account, that transformational leadership theory highlighted these aspects particularly with a focus on in-person communication (Bass, 1985). Contrary to this, this study shows that trust is seen as a critical factor for remote work environments, while individualized consideration seems to play a more significant role in hybrid settings. The distinct importance of trust in remote work can be explained by the unique characteristics and demands of this environment. It is likely, that in a remote work mode, where no direct physical supervision occurs, trust is even more indispensable. Employees must be trusted to manage their tasks autonomously since leaders have limited opportunities to oversee day-to-day work or monitor their work. In this context, trust effectively substitutes the physical oversight that is often more prominent in on-site work models. Additionally, the geographical separation intensifies the need for trust, as employees are given greater flexibility in how they structure their work day. Although Bass (1985) emphasises the aspect of trust and individual attention in a physical environment, this research demonstrates that these principles are relevant in virtual and hybrid contexts, but in a different form.

In the hybrid work model, on the other hand, individual consideration plays a central role. This can be explained by the fact that the increased virtuality in the work context and the constant dynamics lead to employees quickly feeling overlooked and not sensing that their own needs are being taken into account. From this it can be derived that leaders need to respond flexibly to the different challenges that arise from the mix of physical and virtual work, further indicating that effective leaders, even in virtual or partially virtual settings, must go beyond merely conveying clear goals and tasks. They need to foster an environment of trust and a sense of belonging. This illustrates the importance of placing the fundamentally relevant components, which are recognized by the original theories of leadership and are still relevant today, in the context of new working models. Furthermore, this insight has

important implications for future leadership strategies, suggesting that leaders who focus exclusively on efficiency and formal communication methods may overlook a crucial element for communicating with employees effectively.

Based on the findings, it is reasonable to conclude that a neccessity for leaders to develop new competences and strategies exist in order to build trust in an environment where direct face-to-face interaction is rare or constantly changing. Furthermore, this provides relevant insights for future research. It would be interesting to investigate how traditional leadership styles, in particular the transformational leadership approach, need to be adapted in an increasingly digital world of work. Due to the relatively small sample size, this study provides only limited reliable results, but due to the combincation of qualitative and quantitative measures, these represent a good and comprehensive starting point for further investigation.

Besides the above discussed aspects, this research also highlights other factors that have not yet been considered in existing leadership theories. One factor that has not yet been considered is the personal interaction and presence of the leader, which, surprisingly, were explicitly mentioned in the on-site model. This further confirms the already discussed poorer perception of the on-site work model. Combining this with literature, the transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) as well as the effective leadership communication practices of Newman and Ford (2021) do not take these aspects into account.

A possible explanation for this may be that both transformational leadership theory and Newman and Ford consider the leader's presence, whether physical or virtual, as given and not something that requires specific mention or emphasis in their communication strategies. Looking at this against the background of the developments in recent years, the need for physical leadership and personal presence may have changed due to the pandemic-related restrictions on how work is carried out. The increasing digitalisation and remote work that has developed after the pandemic could, however, make physical presence more important again. Not because leaders are directly supervising employees, but because employees appreciate face-to-face interaction more due to the forced virtual work and the virtual working conditions that have been established since then. The Gensler study, which recorded an increasing trend towards office work, could confirm this argument.

Another reason could lie in the general disregard of informal communication. Both transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) and the practices of Newman and Ford (2021) are theoretically designed to achieve organisational goals and create an effective work environment in communication with employees. Therefore, the aspects mentioned there refer to the organisational context. In contrast to this, the results of this research clearly show how important informal communication is, which does not deal with work-related topics but instead fosters the development of a personal relationship. In physical presence, spontaneous interactions, such as lunch breaks or meetings in the coffee kitchen, promote trust and a closer connection between leaders and employees. In virtual environments, this spontaneous communication is often lacking, as digital interactions are usually targeted and formal. Even though team meetings in the hybrid and on-site work model are often held one day a week where employees come together, this does not replace the lack of face-to-face interaction on the remaining workdays.

It is reasonable to conclude that solely virtual presence cannot replace personal interaction, which illustrates an important approach for future research and the need for new theoretical concepts as well as the further development of original theoretical foundations. Furthermore, the targeted promotion of these interactions in the work environment could ultimately have a positive effect on overall satisfaction and team dynamics. This is possible, for example, through the aforementioned open-office spaces, but requires additional concrete measures, such as joint activities outside the work context or deliberate meetings on personal topics or generally informal discussions.

Aligning Employee Perspectives and Leader Assessments

This study further highlights the importance of aligning employee perspectives with leader assessments (see Table 16, concerning the research questions *SQ4* and *SQ5*). The findings support the results from Neufeld et al. (2010), who also identified misalignments between employees and leaders regarding effective communication. These results contribute to the existing research by emphasizing the need for further investigation into the relationship between employee perspectives and leader assessments in the context of effective leadership communication.

The fact that both employees and leaders align in their views on clarity, transparency, individual consideration, and integration highlights the universal importance of these factors

for leadership communication. This shared understanding indicates that the basic principles for effective communication are well-established and recognized as essential by both employees and leaders. This agreement reflects the foundational role these elements play in fostering effective leadership communication, regardless of the work model or environment.

However, other aspects are crystallising that reveal differences in perspectives. These differences between employee perceptions and leader assessments reveal a fundamental contrast in priorities when it comes to leadership communication. One reason for this may lie in the different perspectives of both sides. It can be derived from the results that employees place great value on immediate, practical aspects such as the constant availability of their leaders and regular personal interaction in order to feel supported and involved. Especially in hybrid and remote work models, they feel that clarity and transparency of communication is crucial to avoid misunderstandings and keep track of their tasks. Leaders, on the other hand, take a more strategic approach and focus on ensuring long-term efficiency and a structured flow of information using the available technologies. It can be deduced from this that communication is also a means for leaders to achieve the overall goals of the company. Whilst they are aware of the importance of availability and interaction, they see these primarily as tools to promote productivity and team cohesion. This indicates that successful leadership communication needs to bridge the gap between those two perspectives, addressing both the strategic needs of the leaders and the communicative requirements of the employees.

A further discrepancy exists in the view of technologies and communication modes. The general importance of communication technologies for working and communicating in different work models identified in this thesis confirms the survey results of Sull et al. (2020). These indicate that around 45% of the employees surveyed perceive technologies and communication platforms such as Microsoft Teams as decisive factors for successful virtual work. The qualitative findings of this thesis further demonstrate this, as Microsoft Teams was consistently mentioned by employees and leaders as the most important tool for maintaining effective leadership communication. This highlights the persisting widespread use of the platform and how essential digital communication tools have become, especially in remote and hybrid settings, where traditional face-to-face interaction is limited. It also

reflects the growing reliance on technology to facilitate real-time conversations, task coordination, and information sharing.

Although leaders recognise the importance of technologies and expect employees to use them in a structured and considered manner, employees often struggle with knowing when to use which tool for specific communication purposes. The sheer variety of tools available can lead to misunderstandings, confusion, and even overwhelm. This lack of clarity regarding the appropriate use of different communication platforms adds to the challenges of day-to-day work and complicates the flow of information within teams. This is aligned with the findings from Cakula & Pratt (2021) that it is not enough for technologies to simply be available, as employees must also be able to use these technologies sensibly.

The challenge of using the right technology at the right time not only shows a lack of technological knowledge, but also raises questions about leadership strategy and organisational culture. While leaders take employees' technological skills for granted and expect them to use the tools in a structured manner, the uncertainty among employees indicates a lack of standardisation in communication. This discrepancy is indicative of the overload caused by technological complexity and could point to the psychological stress that employees are exposed to when they have to work with a variety of communication platforms. Instead of facilitating collaboration, the variety of tools can lead to a fragmentation of communication, which increases misunderstandings and inefficiencies. Examples of this include the zoom fatigue mentioned in the literature section or the omnipresent technostress, which has already been addressed in previous literature. From a leader's perspective, this discrepancy could indicate that they may rely too much on technology as a solution without sufficiently understanding how employees perceive and use it in daily practice. Leaders may assume that more tools equate to better communication, but this is not necessarily the case. The results of this work suggest that employees often do not know when to use which tool, indicating a lack of technological integration into organisational structures.

This is closely linked to the aspect of technological education. Being able to use communication tools effectively and sensibly requires continuous training and development of employees' technical skills is necessary to fully embrace the benefits of digital communication. The qualitative results of this study support this view. It was found that the

use of communication platforms, video meeting tools and cloud-based workspaces is often associated with confusion or even uncertainty if employees are not sufficiently trained. This not only has a negative impact on the efficiency of work processes, but also on the perception of leadership communication, as technical barriers make communication more difficult and can potentially lead to misunderstandings. In this context, technological progress brings undeniable advantages in the flexibility and efficiency of communication, but also requires a proactive approach to employee education. This means that leaders should not only promote the introduction of new technologies, but also ensure that their teams can keep up with these developments. Failure to do so could create communication barriers that negatively impact work performance and reduce employee confidence in leadership communication.

In the future, advancements in communication technology, particularly AI-driven tools, have the potential to significantly reduce communication barriers and simplify interactions between different work models. This has also ermeged out of the qualitative results of this thesis. While current technologies enable virtual collaboration and improved over the past years, they cannot replicate the characteristics of natural face-to-face communication. However, as AI tools continue to evolve, they could enhance leadership communication by offering more intuitive, efficient, and structured solutions. These tools could automatically adapt to the preferences and needs of individual employees, streamline information dissemination, and support leaders in maintaining clear and consistent communication across remote and hybrid environments. Additionally, AI could assist in overcoming the challenges of asynchronous communication by providing real-time insights, automating tasks, and even facilitating informal, spontaneous interactions that are often lost in virtual settings.

The Impact of Industry

Looking at the overall findings against the background of the two industries, this thesis provides mixed results. While the quantitative findings show no direct influence of the industry on perceived leadership communication, the qualitative results allow conclusions to be drawn about differences between the industries. Since existing research has not directly compared perceived leadership communication across specific work models in different industries, the structural differences highlighted between the industries emphasize the

importance of exploring how these perceptions vary. Additionally, it is crucial to identify the key factors that drive these differences in communication approaches between the sectors.

Drawing on the differences outlined in the literature section of this work, it seems likely that leadership communication differs between the luxury industry and the chemical industry. The luxury industry emphasizes craftsmanship, exclusivity, and personal engagement, where strong interpersonal relationships are key. The value chain is shorter and more focused on delivering a personal customer experience, which requires leaders to maintain close, face-to-face communication. In contrast, the chemical industry functions as an essential supplier within a longer value chain, where communication is more technical and process-driven, focusing on B2B interactions rather than direct consumer engagement. This is supported by the qualitative findings, which identify personal interaction and interpersonal relationships as important factors in the luxury industry, whereas the chemical industry pursues a more efficiency-based approach that is based less on personal communication Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that these structural differences also create distinct communication environments and lead to different communication priorities.

Moreover, this indicates that different industries are associated with different levels of communicative distance. This offers an opportunity for future research. Communicative distance could be introduced as a concept that describes how distant communication in different industries tends to be from face-to-face interactions. The luxury industry, which relies heavily on interpersonal relationships and face-to-face interactions, would therefore be associated with a lower communicative distance, while the chemical industry, in contrast, has a greater communicative distance. The results allow the interpretation that industries with higher communicative distance, like chemicals, may find it easier to adapt to remote or hybrid work models, as they rely less on in-person interactions. Conversely, industries with lower communicative distance, such as the luxury industry, may face greater challenges in shifting to virtual environments without losing the benefits of personal engagement.

Another more specific finding in this context was that industry plays a role with regard to perceived leadership communication when the influence of work models are taken into account. A possible reason for this could be that when industries are structurally different, it becomes variably challenging to implement remote or hybrid work within those sectors. For

the chemical industry, it may be easier to adopt remote work due to the nature of the work, which places a greater emphasis on process safety and structured procedures. In contrast, in the luxury industry, which represents a people-driven business and relies heavily on personal communication, the implementation of virtual work models is fundamentally more difficult. This is further supported by the findings of this study, which show that the remote work model is not utilized in the luxury industry, while it plays a larger role in the chemical industry, even exceeding the on-site work model. This suggests that structural differences manifest when attempting to integrate different work models within an industry.

Nevertheless, these findings support the view that the factor industry could also have a direct influence on perceived leadership communication. The responses from employees and leaders suggest that different communication priorities are set within the industries, indicating that leadership communication functions differently depending on the sector. However, the fact that the industry plays a role in the circumstances of different work models already demonstrates how important it is to consider industry-specific factors with regard to organisational work processes and the required interpersonal communication. Even though this research could only look at two industries and a limited number of participants due to its limited length and could not be more specific to certain industrial factors, it still provides valuable insights that can be seen as an initial basis for further research.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion and Practical Implications

The findings reveal that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach when it comes to leadership communication across different work models. Each work model – on-site, hybrid, and remote – presents unique demands to leadership communication and require leaders to adapt their communication strategies to the diverse needs of employees in different work models. Therefore, leaders must demonstrate flexibility and adaptability to effectively adjust their communication styles to the varying needs of employees working in different work models. This adaptability is essential to maintain effective communication, regardless of the work model.

While traditional leadership and communication theories still provide valuable frameworks, this research highlights that modern work environments—especially hybrid and remote

models—introduce new complexities that require additional attention. These include the challenges of digital communication, maintaining trust over physical distance, and ensuring clarity in the absence of frequent face-to-face interactions. Thus, new communication strategies need to be integrated into leadership practices to meet the demands of these increasingly flexible work models.

Hybrid work models were found to be the most effective in fostering leadership communication, combining the flexibility of remote work with the engagement of in-person interactions. However, all work models require specific adjustments to leadership communication to meet the diverse needs of employees. Leaders must focus on transparent, flexible, and frequent communication, promoting both autonomy in remote work and collaboration in the office. By combining clarity and transparency as well as technological proficiency, leaders can ensure effective communication across all work models, enhancing both employee satisfaction and the overall team performance.

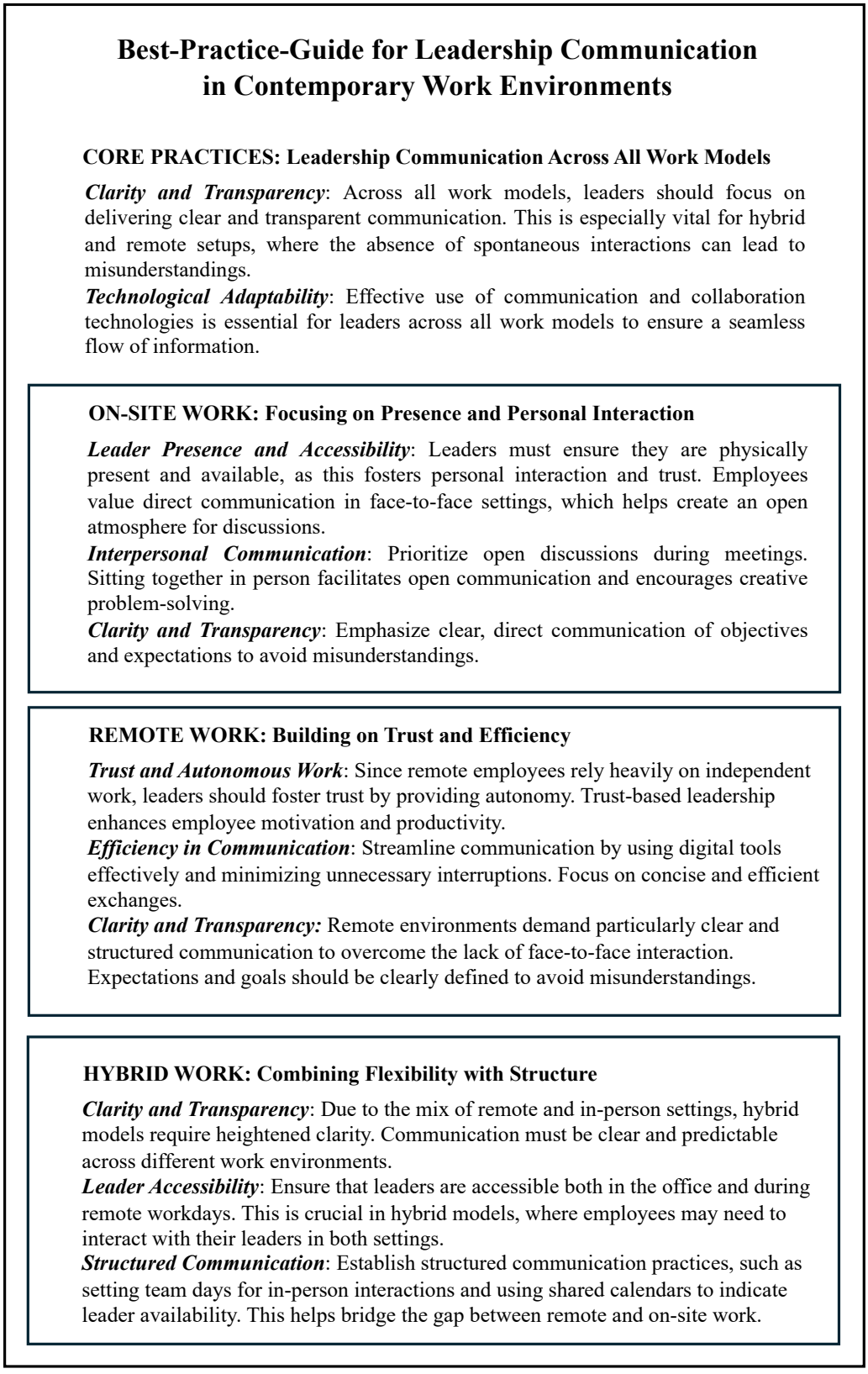
From an industry-specific perspective, the luxury and chemical sectors face distinct challenges in adapting leadership communication to different work models. The luxury industry, with its strong focus on brand identity and personal interaction, benefits most from on-site or hybrid models. These models allow for the personal engagement essential for maintaining strong relationships and brand alignment. In contrast, fully remote work is less suitable in the luxury industry due to the difficulty in maintaining these critical interpersonal elements. On the other hand, the chemical industry, with its emphasis on structured communication and operational efficiency, finds both hybrid and remote models to be more adaptable. These models provide the clarity and structure necessary for operational consistency while still allowing flexibility. Although the quantitative data did not show significant differences in the effectiveness of leadership communication across work models in the two industries, the qualitative findings indicate that differences do exist. Employees and leaders in both sectors pointed to industry-specific needs in leadership communication, highlighting that communication strategies must be tailored to the unique challenges of each industry. In the luxury sector, in-person interaction remains critical, making remote work less effective, whereas the chemical industry can adapt more readily to remote settings with the right communication tools and leadership strategies.

In conclusion, this thesis provides valuable insights into the evolving landscape of leadership communication in contemporary work models. As organizations continue to navigate the shift towards more flexible and remote work models, leaders must develop adaptive, transparent, and clear communication strategies to maintain organizational effectiveness. The findings underscore the importance of utilizing technology in a sensible way while maintaining personal connections and cultural cohesion, regardless of physical distance. By addressing industry-specific challenges and focusing on the unique communication demands of different work models, this thesis adds to the growing body of research on leadership communication. Ultimately, the recommendations derived from this study serve as practical tools for leaders seeking to enhance communication effectiveness in increasingly complex and virtual workplace settings.

This chapter therefore presents a best practice guide for leadership communication based on the findings of this study and provides concrete recommendations for practice in on-site, remote and hybrid work models. The recommendations in this guide are based on transformational leadership theory and the findings on the effectiveness of leadership communication in various work models analyzed in this work. The developed best-practice guide offers a practical framework for effective leadership communication across on-site, remote and hybrid work models. It underscores the importance of adapting communication strategies to meet the distinct challenges and opportunities presented by each work model, ensuring that leadership remains effective in diverse communicative contexts (Figure 10).

Figure 10

Best-Practice-Guide for Leadership Communication in Contemporary Work Models



In the on-site working environment, the guide emphasises the importance of personal interaction and direct communication. Leaders are encouraged to be physically available and approachable to promote transparency and openness in discussions. The guide suggests that regular face-to-face communication builds trust within the team, encourages collaboration and improves team cohesion. In this environment, leaders should communicate continuously and personally with each other and provide immediate and constructive feedback to ensure employees feel included and supported. Additionally, leaders should actively participate in fostering an inclusive work culture by engaging directly on a regular basis.

For remote work, the guide shifts the focus to the need for clear, structured and transparent communication. In the absence of physical presence, digital communication tools are essential for maintaining team connectivity and productivity. The guide recommends that leaders prioritise frequent, clear and concise communication over suitable tools. It further emphasizes that leaders should pay particular attention to communicating expectations, goals and feedback in a clear and timely manner. Regular virtual meetings are seen as key to fostering a sense of belonging and trust in remote teams, closely connected to the effective use of video conferencing and other innovative tools to enable clear and structured communication.

Hybrid work environments require a more sophisticated approach, combining the communication strategies of remote and on-site models. The guide emphasises the need for leaders to bridge the gap between face-to-face interactions and virtual communication by maintaining consistency in communication practices, whether employees are working remotely or in the office. Leaders are advised to ensure that communication remains clear and inclusive by utilising both collaborative digital tools and face-to-face meetings. The guide emphasises the importance of adaptability in hybrid environments, where leaders need to be able to communicate effectively across multiple channels and ensure that all employees, regardless of location, feel equally informed and engaged.

Central to the guide's recommendations are the two key communication principles that are relevant across all work models: clarity and transparency, as well as technological adaptability. Clarity and transparency are fundamental to leadership communication as they ensure that all employees, whether working on-site, remotely or in a hybrid environment, receive clear and precise instructions and expectations. Leaders are encouraged to

communicate openly, provide clearly defined goals and give feedback in a timely and direct manner. This openness helps to foster a culture of openness where employees know what is expected of them. Consistent and transparent communication also reduces the risk of misunderstandings and promotes alignment within the team as it ensures that all employees have the same level of information and insight, regardless of their location or work model. By maintaining transparency, leaders also create an environment of accountability where the flow of information is seamless and employees stay informed of organisational changes, decisions or updates, which in turn strengthens cohesion and commitment among employees.

Technological adaptability, on the other hand, is becoming increasingly important as communication tools are central to the success of all work models. Leaders need to not only master these tools, but also ensure they are utilising them sensibly and to their full potential to ensure seamless communication across different locations. Technological adaptability requires the ability to effectively employ a variety of tools, such as video conferencing or instant messaging platforms, to keep employees connected and ensure the efficient sharing of information. This requires a certain level of technological education as well as the ability to adapt quickly to new technologies or platforms as they emerge. Proficiency with these tools ensures that communication barriers are reduced and helpts to maintain productivity and collaboration, especially when personal interaction is not possible. Leaders therefore need to guide their employees in the efficient use of these technologies and ensure that the right tools are chosen for the right purpose.

This best-practice guide not only aligns with the findings of this study but also provides a practical framework that can be adapted to the unique needs of different industries. It is especially relevant in sectors like luxury and chemical industries, where communication demands differ based on the structure of the industry and differing operational requirements. Ultimately, this guide serves as a resource for leaders aiming to navigate the complexities of modern work environments and enhance their leadership communication practices.

Chapter 9 – Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study offers valuable insights into the influence of on-site, remote, and hybrid work models on perceptions of leadership communication within the luxury and chemical industries, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. These limitations stem from restricted resources regarding sample sizes, the characteristics of the research method, and the researcher's perspective.

One limitation consists in the potential bias that may arise from the chosen research methods. Since the survey data is based on participants' self-reported information, there is a risk of response bias, influenced by social desirability or personal biases. Employees may either overstate or understate their perceptions of leadership communication to portray either their behavior or their leaders in a more favorable light. Additionally, individual experiences or specific circumstances may influence responses, leading to subjective biases. Furthermore, the researcher's presence during qualitative interviews may have influenced participants to give socially desirable rather than completely honest responses.

Moreover, given the interpretive nature of the study, it is important to consider the potential biases that may result from the researcher's personal background and perspective when interpreting the findings. Despite these limitations, efforts were made to minimize their impact by conducting the research rigorously and adhering to high-quality standards, thereby enhancing the study's credibility.

Another limitation of this study is the limited resources, particularly the restricted sample size. The research analyzed more than 100 survey responses and conducted 15 qualitative interviews, which yielded valuable results and implications. However, the small sample sizes and the limited qualitative data from participants in specific work models only partly reflect the perceptions of leadership communication within contemporary work environments. As a result, the findings should be interpreted with caution and should not be generalized or extended to the broader population without careful consideration.
Moreover, due to the limited length of the study, it was not possible to cross-examine all the results that would have been possible with the data collected. By replicating and multiplying the study, more detailed insights can be gained in further research.

Considering these limitations, future research could expand on this study's results. Further investigations into perceptions of leadership communication across different work models could be conducted with a larger sample size, encompassing both employees' and leaders' perspectives. This would deepen the understanding of the topic and allow the results to be more broadly generalized. Additionally, the industry aspect should be examined in greater detail in future studies. Given the limited research in this area, this study focused on the luxury and chemical industries, representing two structurally different sectors. A more comprehensive exploration and comparison of additional industries could provide broader and more reliable insights into the influence of industry-specific factors on the perception of leadership communication, both in relation to work models and independently. Furthermore, the aspect of communicative distance could be examined more closely in this context and applied to other industries. Another aspect that should be considered for future research is the development and impact of the open-office spaces mentioned above. Here, it would be interesting to investigate how these affect communication dynamics in office environments and what influence they have on the perception of effective communication.

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A. Interview Invitation

Interview Invitation

„Leading Beyond Boundaries: A Comparative Analysis of Leadership Communication in Hybrid, Remote, and On-Site Work Environments“

AIM

This research examines the perception of leadership communication in different work models – hybrid, remote, and on-site. Employee assessments are linked with expert perspectives of leaders to identify future focal points for leadership communication in contemporary work environments.

RESEARCH PROJECT

- Generating scientific insights with practical relevance in the research field of leadership and leadership communication
- Interaction of science and practice, from which the identification of practical recommendations for action emerges
- Determining the relevance of the industrial factor in the field of leadership
- Insight-based development of practical design measures for leaders

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Lisbon is a renowned university in Portugal, founded in 1967, known for its academic excellence and international partnerships. The Faculty of Human Sciences and the Master in Communication Science offer a major in Strategic Communication and Leadership, under which this research is conducted.

UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

CATÓLICA FACULDADE DE CIÊNCIAS HUMANAS

PROCESS

Participants who are **employees** or hold **leadership positions** in the **luxury or chemical industry** in Germany are sought.

The interview will be conducted as a conversation with **open questions**.

The duration is approximately **30-45 minutes**. The interview can be conducted via **phone, Zoom, or Teams.**

Data processing will be carried out according to scientific standards, and the collected data can be **anonymized** upon request.

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I would greatly appreciate your participation!

TIMING

Planned survey period:
June – July 2024

B. Code Books

B.1 Employee Code Book

Code	Description	Example	Category	Coding Instructions
Organization, Industry and Role	The organization, the industry and the position that the employee accompanies	"It's the chemical industry. The organization, BASF, is the largest chemical company in the world with, well (…) I would say over 100,000 employees worldwide."		Code when information about organization, industry or job role is provided
On-Site	Employees from an on-site work model	"I work fully on-site, this has always been the case for me, even during the pandemic."	Work Model	Employees who mainly work from on-site (rare and irregularly remote days excluded)
Remote	Employees from a remote work model	"I work 90 percent remotely."	Work Model	Employees who mainly work from home (rare and irregularly office visits excluded)
Hybrid	Employees from a hybrid work model	"Yes, I'm in the office twice a week and work remotely from home three times a week. It sometimes happens the other way around, but most of the time it's like that, you could say."	Work Model	Employees who work in a different work model at least once a week.
Important	Employees who perceive the communication with their leader as important	"Leadership communication is crucial in my role. We have a relatively flat structure, but my leader plays a key role in all of our running projects."	Importance of Leadership Communication	Code when employees emphasize a high relevance of leadership communication

Less Important	Employees who perceive the communication with their leader as less important	"Honestly, from my role or from our collective bargaining team's role, it's relatively minor because we work quite independently."	Importance of Leadership Communication	Code when employees express that communication with their leader is of low importance
Perceived Strategy in Leadership Communication	Perception whether a strategic approach is followed by the leaders	"Yes, definitely. We've brought in a bit more structure since our team has grown. I think you don't need as much organization and structure when the team consists of one or two people. Now, some are working from home, some are in the office, and some are traveling."		Code when employees perceive that their leader follows a strategic approach to communication
Reachability	The leader is reachable	"Good question. Personally, as an employee, I value that my leader is available when I need them – that they are reachable."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when reachability is mentioned as a key factor
Physical Presence	Physical Presence of the leader on-site	"In a meeting room, face-to-face, sitting on a desk together, that's when I have the feeling that I can talk openly."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when physical presence is mentioned as a key factor
Feedback	Feedback provided by the leader	"So, I think the most important thing for me in the business area is that people are open with each other and can share feedback."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when feedback is mentioned as a key factor
Integration and Individual Consideration	The leader integrates and considers the employees individually	"I think it's also important that a leader keeps an eye on that and isn't just focused on business, business, business. Instead, she should look into the team itself and see what personalities are in the team, what they need, and adapt a bit to the team and not just work in a way that suits her."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when integration and individual consideration is mentioned as a key factor

Clarity and Transparency	The leaders provide clarity and transparency in communication	"I also find it important to be structured and to know exactly who is responsible for which topics. I think that's an important quality a leader should have."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when clarity and transparency is mentioned as a key factor
Trust	Mutual relationship of trust	"It also partly depends on trust and knowledge, right? If my supervisor had too much insight into my area of work, she would probably get more involved."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when trust is mentioned as a key factor
Flexibility	The leader is flexible	"I'm personally glad that we don't have strict rules saying, "You must come in on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday." Instead, they say, "Choose the model that works for you, where you can work together as a small team, and make sure everyone is there on the team days." That's the only fixed requirement we have."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when trust is mentioned as a key factor
Efficiency	Efficiency in work and communication	"In terms of efficiency, which is a major concern for me, eliminating commuting time—nearly two hours a day—allows that time to be used for work instead. You start working earlier, and overall, remote work is significantly more efficient."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when efficiency is mentioned as a key factor
Communication Frequency	The leader communicates frequently	"Regular communication with supervisors is crucial in remote work."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when communication frequency is mentioned as a key factor
Important	Importance of the leader's responsiveness	"Yes, that's important because when you have something on your plate, you want to get it resolved as quickly as possible."	Assessment of Effective Leadership Communication Practices / Responsiveness	Code when responsiveness is seen as important

Less important	Importance of the leader's responsiveness	x	Assessment of Effective Leadership Communication Practices / Responsiveness	Code when responsiveness is seen as less important
Important	Importance of the leader's communication frequency	"That's important too, of course. I think you should hear from each other regularly, whether you're in the home office or at the office."	Assessment of Effective Leadership Communication Practices/ Frequency	Code when communication frequency is seen as important
Less important	Importance of the leader's communication frequency	"Well, as I said, it's somewhat influenced by personal preference – less important, I'd say."	Assessment of Effective Leadership Communication Practices / Frequency	Code when communication frequency is seen as less important
Important	Importance of the predictability of leadership communication	"It's important. From my perspective, it's important to be able to connect when needed."	Assessment of Effective Leadership Communication Practices / Predictability	Code when predictability is seen as important
Less important	Importance of the predictability of leadership communication	"Not that important to me, actually. I think it's cool that we have this weekly exchange as a team, but I wouldn't describe communication with my supervisor as planned."	Assessment of Effective Leadership Communication Practices / Predictability	Code when predictability is seen as less important
Important	Importance of the clarity in leadership communication	"I consider clarity very important. Being clear and transparent is especially required when different communication channels are mixed – which happens a lot when people are working in different work settings and from different locations."	Assessment of Effective Leadership Communication Practices / Clarity	Code when clarity is seen as important

Less important	Importance of the clarity in leadership communication	x	Assessment of Effective Leadership Communication Practices / Clarity	Code when clarity is seen as less important
Important	Importance of the mode of communication	"Absolutely, having the right tools available is essential."	Assessment of Effective Leadership Communication Practices / Communication Mode	Code when the communication mode is seen as important
Less important	Importance of the mode of communication	"It’s important for me to receive a response, regardless of the method. Whether the exchange happens via email or Teams doesn’t matter."	Assessment of Effective Leadership Communication Practices / Communication Mode	Code when the communication mode is seen as less important
Important	Importance of the technological foundations necessary for communication	"Of course, technology is crucial. Having reliable tools like Teams is essential for maintaining smooth communication and ensuring that we can all connect ourselves."	Assessment of Effective Leadership Communication Practices / Technological Foundations	Code when technological foundations are seen as important
Less important	Importance of the technological foundations necessary for communication	x	Assessment of Effective Leadership Communication Practices / Technological Foundations	Code when technological foundations are seen as less important

Consistency	Consistency in leadership communication strategies	"There is no consistency. And a lack of consistency can sometimes lead to confusion or missed messages, which then requires additional follow-up and can slow down the overall progress."	Communication Challenges	Code when consistency is named as a challenge
Communication Frequency	Frequent Communication between leaders and employees	"And I realized that when communicating virtually, the frequency decreases, which is most probably normal when you're physically not in the same place. But it does represent a challenge for me."	Communication Challenges	Code when communication frequency is named as a challenge
Efficiency and Information Dissemination	Efficiency in communication and information dissemination	"Exactly. Or where what was agreed upon becomes irrelevant after six months, and you have to start the discussion anew. Yes, that's exactly it."	Communication Challenges	Code when efficiency and information dissemination is named as a challenge
Communication Mode and Technology	Communication channels and technology used for leadership communication	"However, there are occasional technical interruptions, typically due to insufficient data or inadequate connections, which could be more stable."	Communication Challenges	Code when communication mode and technology is named as a challenge
Clarity and Transparency	Clarity and transparency in leadership communication	"Clear communication is crucial—conveying regulations effectively without making the message so complex that it becomes unclear, leading to misunderstandings or complications."	Communication Challenges	Code when clarity and transparency is named as a challenge
Availability	Availability of the leader	"You don't see each other. Sure, you have the green-yellow-red symbol in Teams that might give you a hint, but how often do we have a blocker for our own work time or a meeting we're about to join? So, you don't know exactly what the other person is doing and how available they are for you."	Communication Challenges	Code when consistency is named as a challenge

Personal Interaction	Personal interaction with the leader	"For me, personally, it is crucial that my leader is accessible, also in relation to the physical presence."	Communication Challenges	Code when personal interaction is named as a challenge
Personal Exchange	Personal exchange as a communication tool	"The most important platform is, as mentioned, personal interaction."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when personal exchange is named as an important tool
E-Mail	Communication over e-mail	"For daily business, email is still our primary communication tool."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when E-Mail is named as an important tool
Webex	Communication over Webex	"Personally, I don’t have a company phone, but we use Microsoft Teams, email, and Webex for communication."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when Webex is named as an important tool
WhatsApp	Communication over WhatsApp	"But it’s very close because we also use WhatsApp and phone calls, and if you consider WhatsApp and phone calls as one tool, then it’s very close to Teams."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when Whatsapp is named as an important tool
Phone Calls	Communication over phone calls	"That’s difficult. For communication between us as a team, probably phone calls or text messages."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when phone calls are named as an important tool
MS Teams	Communication over Teams	"Coordination, even from home, works very well through Teams."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when MS Teams is named as an important tool
Negative Evaluation	Negative perception of feedback mechanisms provided by the leader	"No, that’s not really asked."	Feedback Mechanisms	Code when a negative perception of feedback mechanisms is reported
Positive Evaluation	Positive perception of feedback mechanisms provided by the leader	"Absolutely. We also have a protocol that’s written up each time, with a different person responsible for leading it. We keep track of points and sometimes create outcome reports to review what has happened a few weeks later. "	Feedback Mechanisms	Code when a positive evaluation of feedback mechanisms is reported

Consistency	More consistency in communication	"And this ultimately harms the entire team and the company. Consistency will help prevent misunderstandings, keep everyone aligned with the goals, and foster a sense of belonging and togetherness within the team."	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Leadership Competences	Code when consistency is named as a future focal point
Frequency	More frequent communication	"Maybe having more regular communication. If someone is working from home, it would be good to check in at least once in the morning. Not to say, "Okay, hello, I'm here now and starting work." Not to monitor work hours, but just to keep in touch."	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Leadership Competences	Code when frequency is named as a future focal point
Clarity and Transparency	More clarity in communication	"And also having a bit more structure and transparency in communication, so that nobody feels disconnected."	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Leadership Competences	Code when clarity and transparency is named as a future focal point
Flexibility	More flexibility from the leader	"Yes. So, in my opinion, leadership communication will need to focus even more on flexibility and inclusivity to find a suitable approach for every work environment."	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Leadership Competences	Code when flexibility is named as a future focal point
Trust	Trust between the leader and the employee	"Depending on what kind of leader you are, you might need a lot of control, or you might not trust easily. Nonetheless, you need to find your way and not just eliminate these work models to have everyone neatly in the office where you can control them. "	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Leadership Competences	Code when trust is named as a future focal point

Presence and Accessibility	Presence and accessibility of the leader	"Definitely, personal accessibility – being physically present on-site. Also, the accessibility of supervisors, who are often stressed, have no time, and are booked with numerous appointments, leading to inaction. Accessibility, whether through technology or otherwise, is crucial. "	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Leadership Competences	Code when presence and eccessibility is named as a future focal point
Integration and Individual Consideration	Higher individual consideration by the leader	"Yes. So, in my opinion, leadership communication will need to focus even more on flexibility and inclusivity to find a suitable approach for every work environment. "	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Leadership Competences	Code when integration and individual consideration is named as a future focal point
Efficiency and Information Dissemination	Efficiency in communication and information dissemination	"The quality is noticeably declining. For example, whether working on-site or not. We send out information about certain regulations, and then I get the same question from the same unit three times."	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Future Focal Points	Code when efficiency and information dissemination is named as a future focal point
Technological Education	Improvement of technological issues	"Presence and personal interaction Presence of the leader and personal interaction with the leader "We are all working in different work models with different work structures so it's important to find times where we are all present in the office at the same time." Improvements, Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences "	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Future Focal Points	Code when technological education is named as a future focal point
Innovation	Innovative tools in leadership communications	"So, it's a significant topic, and artificial intelligence, the Metaverse, and other innovations will likely come into play later. Many people are already working on that."	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Future Focal Points	Code when innovation is named as a future focal point

Supervisor Work Model	Supervisor work model as an influencing factor	"Yes, our supervisor works from home. Sometimes, you don't even know if they are present. They might be there, but have appointments in offices far away, and you are not aware of it."	Other Influencing Factors	Code when supervisor work model is named as an influencing factor
Generation	Generation as an influencing factor	"I think it's really a generational issue. That's my opinion. Because it's not a problem, but rather a specialty, let's put it that way."	Other Influencing Factors	Code when generation is named as an influencing factor
Industry	Industry as an influencing factor	"We have topics where we used to have a governance function. We could enforce regulations strictly, approve, or reject things."	Other Influencing Factors	Code when industry is named as an influencing factor

B.2 Leader Code Book

Code	Description	Example	Category	Coding Instructions
Organization, Industry and Job Role	The organization, industry, and the role that the leader holds.	"Sure. I'm the General Manager and Managing Director of TAG Heuer Central Europe. TAG Heuer is a brand under LVMH, and Central Europe is a cluster covering three countries: Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands."		Code when information about organization, industry or job role is provided

Remote Work in the Luxury Industry	The prevalence and distribution of remote work in the luxury industry.	"No, that's not possible. I don't think it's feasible in the luxury industry. I see that for positions where it might be possible, there's a trend or push to return to the office. I think that's because the luxury industry is very, very conservative. We have old values that we still adhere to."	Work Model	Code when information regarding remote work in the luxury industry is provided
Team Size and Work Structure	The number of employees and the structure of the team.	"I have around 60 employees, two-thirds of whom work in retail, in our own stores. The rest are in staff functions like marketing, HR, customer operations, customer service, finance, and so on, including customer support."	Work Model	Code when information about team size and work structure is provided
On-Site	Leaders who operate in an on-site work model.	"I actually work fully on-site, unless I'm traveling. I'm one of those who doesn't like to work from home. It's a point where many people are different, of course."	Work Model	Leaders who mainly work on-site (rare and irregularly remote days excluded)
Remote	Leaders who operate in a fully remote work model.	x	Work Model	Leaders who mainly work from home (rare and irregularly office visits excluded)
Hybrid	Leaders who work within a hybrid work model, combining both on-site and remote elements.	"Actually, my preferred model is the hybrid one—three or four days on-site and one or two days working from home—because it combines the best of both worlds."	Work Model	Leaders who work in a hybrid model (different work model at least once a week.)

Strategy in Leadership Communication	The strategic approach adopted in leadership communication.	"Absolutely. Very strategic, because there are three levels of communication. There's structured, formal, and personal communication. The first is weekly communication about results and goals, which serves as a bit of a business motivational management tool. Then there's more formal monthly or annual communication about milestones on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, or half-year basis. And then there's the third level, the personal day-to-day communication, which is very spontaneous, allowing for more authenticity and the ability to influence indirect aspects that might not be noticed in formal communication."		Code when the leader follows a strategic approach to communication with employees
Less Important	Leaders who perceive communication with their employees as less critical or essential.	"Well, I want my employees to be empowered to work autonomously. They need to be, because we have different regions, and the work is often very local."	Importance of Leadership Communication	Code when leaders perceive communication with employees as important
Important	Leaders who perceive communication with their employees as very important and essential to their role.	"For me, it's extremely important. As the saying goes, "It's all about communication," and 80 percent of it is non-verbal. You have to consider both verbal and non-verbal communication. "	Importance of Leadership Communication	Code when leaders perceive communication with employees as less important
Motivation and Support	Motivating employees and providing them with support in their work tasks.	"I have a very strong celebration mindset. Everything is always great, and everything needs to be highlighted. That's a strategy, yes."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when motivation and support is named as a key factor
Presence and Accessibility	Ensuring presence and accessibility for employees when needed.	"It's crucial to remain active, present, and approachable as a leader, even if you are not physically in the same room."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when presence and accessibility is named as a key factor

Preparation	Taking time to properly prepare communication strategies and measures.	"Preparation is a very important skill—analyzing your audience a bit to adapt the words you use."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when preparation is named as a key factor
Communication Mode and Technology	Utilizing the right communication channels and technological tools to enable effective communication.	"The tools we use—whether verbal, written, or oral communication—are crucial."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when communication mode and technology is named as a key factor
Efficiency	Ensuring that communication is conducted in an efficient manner.	"Efficiency is very important to me, especially working time-efficiently."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when efficiency is named as a key factor
Timely Communication	The practice of delivering communication in a timely and responsive manner.	"For me, precise and timely communication is essential. We need clear deadlines and effective cross-functional communication because our communication doesn't stop within the team; we interact with Supply, Retail, Finance, and it's crucial to have a continuous and precise communication flow where everyone is informed at the right time and the appropriate stakeholders are involved."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when timely communication is named as a key factor
Personal Interaction	Engaging in personal, face-to-face interactions with employees.	"Nevertheless, you need to maintain a personal level. So, you always have your two or three moments where you first ask how things are going, what's new, etc."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when personal interaction is named as a key factor

Fairness	Communicating with a focus on fairness and equality.	"Yes, one point that I haven't mentioned yet, but which is important to me, is the sense of fairness towards all employees. Particularly in production and logistics, employees don't have the opportunity to work remotely. They might perceive this as favoritism when others are allowed to stay home. "	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when fairness is named as a key factor
Empathy	Demonstrating empathy and understanding in communication with employees.	"What is definitely also needed to lead a team is empathy, to read between the lines."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when empathy is named as a key factor
Consistency	Maintaining consistency in messages, actions, and communication efforts.	"Clearly, structured communication is crucial. Consistency is key – so that it's not different today than tomorrow, and everyone knows the processes inside and out and what to expect."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when consistency is named as a key factor
Frequency	Communicating frequently with employees to keep them informed and engaged.	"Continuous feedback and communication are crucial."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when frequency is named as a key factor
Integration and Individual Consideration	Ensuring that every employee is individually considered and integrated into communication efforts.	"I think it's crucial to explicitly involve everyone from the beginning, to greet them, ensure that everyone is punctual when the meeting starts, and that everyone knows the agenda. "	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when integration and individual consideration is named as a key factor
Trust	Building and maintaining trust in employees through clear and honest communication.	"In terms of the team, it's fundamentally a matter of trust. I'm not the type of leader who insists on logging in at 8 AM and then checks if the mouse is moving every 30 seconds. It's about trust. "	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when trust is named as a key factor

Clarity and Transparency	Ensuring that communication is clear and transparent, avoiding ambiguity.	"Clarity in communication, and depending on the message, keeping it simple. That's very important. Present the top three points you want to address, repeat them twice, and rephrase them three times so that the top three points stick in the mind."	Key Factors of Effective Leadership Communication	Code when clarity and transparency is named as a key factor
Efficiency and Information Dissemination	Highlighting inefficiencies in communication processes and the distribution of information.	"Nowadays, you end up with a vast number of calls in your calendar on topics that didn't used to be there. No one would have come to your office for a 45-minute discussion on issues that are now handled in calls. Sometimes, a call scheduled for an hour might only need five minutes to resolve. "	Communication Challenges	Code when efficiency and information dissemination is named as a challenge
Structure and Consistency	Addressing a lack of structure and consistency in leadership communication.	"Consistency is one major challenge. We have our team meeting and then the individual ones, but the fact is, we're not sitting next to each other in the office. Out of sight, out of mind. So, continuously maintaining outreach while everyone is busy with their daily tasks is crucial to keep the connection and share knowledge. This is very important so that no one feels left out."	Communication Challenges	Code when structure and consistency is named as a challenge
Individual Consideration	Considering individual needs during communication, especially in change processes.	"You have to take them along too, almost holding their hand. Are you okay? Do you feel comfortable? Slowly bringing them across this bridge. Selling change is difficult because it's a very personal matter. You really have to adapt to each individual, even more than in normal leadership, I think."	Communication Challenges	Code when individual consideration is named as a challenge

Communication Mode and Technology	Using unsuitable communication channels that hinder effective communication.	"Additionally, we have so many channels—Teams, WhatsApp, email, phone calls, and scheduled meetings—that it creates constant noise, and the traditional "sit down and work through tasks" approach gets lost. This is definitely a problem."	Communication Challenges	Code when communication mode and technology is named as a challenge
Organizational Factors	Factors within the organization that impact communication processes and effectiveness.	"I think it's just different. When you always see each other physically, there might be different kinds of conflicts compared to when you see each other virtually in a team. There are little things, like having a shared desk principle and constantly swapping desks. Since not everyone has their own desk anymore, one person might not be very happy if the previous person didn't lower the desk or left something there overnight."	Communication Challenges	Code when organizational factors are named as a challenge
Frequency	Instances of infrequent or insufficient communication.	"I think the most important thing is really maintaining regular contact, reaching out to each employee at least every other day and checking in on how they are doing."	Communication Challenges	Code when communication frequency is named as a challenge
Creativity	Difficulty fostering creativity, particularly in virtual work setups.	"Yes. In marketing, the lack of creativity in a virtual space is a significant issue. This is due to several factors: the tactile experience of handling materials, the ability to create mood boards together, brainstorm, and have personal interactions. This clearly gets lost in virtual settings."	Communication Challenges	Code when creativity is named as a challenge

Motivation	A decline in employee motivation due to inadequate communication.	"And especially then, you have to look at how to keep people motivated."	Communication Challenges	Code when motivation is named as a challenge
Reachability	A lack of availability from leadership, leading to communication issues.	"Also, managing expectations about when and how one is available is crucial. This has become more important because otherwise, you don't know when someone is in a meeting or how to reach them. "	Communication Challenges	Code when reachability is named as a challenge
Personal Interaction	Insufficient personal interaction with employees, particularly in virtual setups.	"We observed that the team dynamic suffered when people didn't see each other due to varying in-office days. The sense of cohesion and team spirit was affected, and communication stalled."	Communication Challenges	Code when personal interaction is named as a challenge
Presence	A lack of leadership presence for employees.	"The challenge then is ensuring that everyone is actually on-site. As I mentioned, we have hybrid models, so if eight people are present but two are working from home, we still have a hybrid Webex setup."	Communication Challenges	Code when presence is named as a challenge
Engagement	A lack of engagement from employees, often due to poor communication.	"Yes. I've actually instituted a phone ban during in-person meetings because I find it annoying when everyone is constantly multitasking."	Communication Challenges	Code when engagement is named as a challenge
Transparency and Clarity	Difficulties in maintaining transparency and clarity in communication.	"For effective communication, one challenge is having clear lines of leadership and ensuring that there is an impact on employees. It must be clear who the superior is."	Communication Challenges	Code when transparency and clarity is named as a challenge

Agility	The flexibility and agility of virtual work setups in adapting to changing needs.	"On the other hand, the virtual setup can be more agile; for instance, you can quickly bring someone into a discussion if you have a question and they are not physically present. You can just connect them briefly, which is an advantage of the virtual setup."	Communication in Different Work Models / Virtual	Code when agility is mentioned as a differing aspect.
Efficiency	The efficiency of the virtual work environment in supporting leadership communication.	"Virtual communication, on the other hand, is much more direct, a bit dry, but at the same time more cautious because you never know what's being recorded or filmed. Virtual communication remains very efficient and focused, but it loses some of the non-verbal cues."	Communication in Different Work Models / Virtual	Code when efficiency is mentioned as a differing aspect.
Creativity	On-site work setups are viewed as more conducive to fostering creativity.	"And you can also be much more creative. There's a difference between communicating with an employee over the phone and conducting a mini-workshop, versus having someone in the office and saying, "Hey, we both have an hour free; let's think completely out of the box about how we might reorganize the task you need to complete by the end of the week.""	Communication in Different Work Models / On-Site	Code when creativity is mentioned as a differing aspect.
Personal Communication	On-site work is perceived as more favorable for effective personal communication.	"Absolutely, and personal connections can be better developed through office communication."	Communication in Different Work Models / On-Site	Code when personal communication is mentioned as a differing aspect.

Non-verbal Communication	The visibility of non-verbal communication cues, which are more easily observed in on-site work environments.	"Yes, virtual communication, as good as it is, does lose something in terms of body language and immediate reactions. It's not the same as being in a personal meeting. Clearly, there's a lack of the personal touch and trust that comes with face-to-face interactions. "	Communication in Different Work Models / On-Site	Code when non-verbal communication is mentioned as a differing aspect.
Feedback Mechanisms	Systems in place that allow employees to openly share feedback and concerns.	"We have an official feedback session once a year. We try to have a very structured feedback round at the end of our monthly or quarterly meetings, where we clarify what worked and what we should improve. This feedback are 360 degrees, not just on behavior but also on organization, content, and so on. We also try to provide very quick, spontaneous feedback at the end of important meetings."		Code when feedback mechasnisms are provided
Cloud Sharing	The use of cloud-sharing platforms to support communication and collaboration.	"Then (…) there are clouds, where we share data in certain areas and have shared folders."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when cloud sharing is named as an important tool
Notes	The use of note-taking systems or applications for communication purposes.	"We also use Notes extensively for knowledge management within the team."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when Notes are named as an important tool
E-Mail	The use of email as a formal communication channel.	"Emails are considered very old-fashioned and not preferred anymore, but I notice that people still work a lot with their inboxes, and if something doesn't land in their inbox, it doesn't happen."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when E-Mails are named as an important tool

Personal Interaction	The importance of personal interaction in leadership communication.	"Outlook for email and MS Teams for meetings and chat functions, where we can also quickly exchange information and files. This is followed by SharePoint, and of course, in-person meetings."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when personal exchange is named as an important tool
On-Site Meetings	The use of in-person meetings for communication and decision-making.	"Yes. So, on Tuesdays, we're all in the office, but we don't necessarily have many structured meetings because we try to hold meetings on Mondays when people are virtual. Since our business model is very dispersed, we have people everywhere, so we try to organize meetings on Mondays."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when on-site meetings are named as an important tool
WhatsApp	The use of WhatsApp for informal communication with employees.	"The main tools are still email, Teams, and WhatsApp."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when Whatsapp is named as an important tool
Phone Calls	The use of phone calls as a communication channel.	"For remote communication, the phone is really crucial for me, and I mean speaking, not texting"	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when phone calls are named as an important tool
MS Teams	The use of Microsoft Teams for virtual meetings and collaboration.	"No, no. Teams is primarily what we use. We also have many meetings on Teams, especially on Fridays when people are working from home. When people are in the office, we don't need it as much."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when MS Teams is named as an important tool
Webex	The use of Webex as a virtual communication platform.	"However, with a WebEx conference where everyone is dialed in, information can be shared and communicated effectively."	Communication Tools and Technology	Code when Webex is named as an important tool

Development and Structure of Work	The evolution and organization of work models and communication strategies.	"I don’t think the requirement for office presence will ever disappear, at least for two days a week. We have also implemented fixed office days this year. We noticed that even if we mandate employees to be in the office on two days, it can still happen that one person comes in on Monday and Tuesday, another on Thursday and Wednesday, and yet another on Friday and Tuesday."	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Future Focal Points	Code when development and structure of work models are mentioned regarding future focal points
Professional Communication	The evolution and organization of work models and communication strategies.	"Additionally, what’s not a complete blind spot but still underdeveloped is how professionals, both leaders and employees, present themselves in virtual environments. We can all share slides and have discussions, but how to sit professionally in front of the camera, maintain eye contact, be well-lit, and engage people is still lacking."	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Future Focal Points	Code when professional communication is named as a future focal point
Engagement	Employee engagement and involvement in communication efforts.	"Many still switch off or multitask during conferences. This is a major issue, with attention spans decreasing, and people often check emails and aren’t fully focused. There is definitely room for improvement."	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Future Focal Points	Code when engagement is named as a future focal point
Technological Education	Training employees to use communication tools effectively and appropriately.	"There are definitely many people who use this channel somewhat excessively, and with the rapid adoption of Teams when COVID hit, not everyone really learned how to manage it properly."	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Future Focal Points	Code when technological education is named as a future focal point

Innovation	The role of communication in fostering innovation within the organization.	"One trend I've noticed in the past six months is the increasing use of ChatGPT and artificial intelligence. You see more and more that communication is being generated to become even more efficient."	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Future Focal Points	Code when innovation is named as a future focal point
Presence	Emphasizing the significance of presence and direct personal interaction in communication.	"I think a certain level of presence will always be needed because it greatly facilitates collaboration."	Future Focal Points and Leadership Competences / Future Focal Points	Code when presence is named as a future focal point
Communication Clarity	Ensuring that communication is clear, precise, and easily understood.	"Secondly, I think it's becoming more important to be concise—clear and simple in explaining messages. Clarity and simplicity are key."	Future Developments and Leadership Competences /Leadership Competences	Code when communication clarity is named as a future focal point
Trust	Building a foundation of trust through transparent and reliable communication.	"Exactly, trust that everyone is doing what they are supposed to."	Future Developments and Leadership Competences /Leadership Competences	Code when trust is named as a future focal point
Frequency	Communicating with employees regularly and consistently.	"More communication is needed, and while it's not hard for me to communicate, it's more effective when there's a reciprocation from the other side. If one person is talking and the other has nothing to say, you start to wonder if they're truly interested."	Future Developments and Leadership Competences /Leadership Competences	Code when frequency is named as a future focal point
Flexibility and Agility	Adapting leadership communication styles based on the situation and employee needs.	"For me, flexibility and agility are crucial – adapting quickly to new tools, new generations, and new ways of communicating. This adaptability isn't just about technology but also about embracing new styles."	Future Developments and Leadership Competences /Leadership Competences	Code when flexibility and agility is named as a future focal point

Pursuing a Vision	Communicating a clear and inspiring vision.	"Leadership requires having or developing a clear vision with the people you lead. In terms of content, if you're asking what is crucial, openness is important."	Future Developments and Leadership Competences /Leadership Competences	Code when pursuing a vision is named as a future focal point
Inclusive Leading and Individual Consideration	Leading inclusively by considering the individual needs of each employee.	"Well, I'm not sure if this is more related to the hybrid model or the new generation, but I believe that inclusive leadership has become much more important. By this, I mean involving employees more in decision-making processes and making them feel part of the team."	Future Developments and Leadership Competences /Leadership Competences	Code when inclusive leading and individual consideration is named as a future focal point
Organizational Aspects	Organizational factors that impact or influence the overall communication strategy.	"If you compare a corporate company with thousands of employees to a startup, the necessity for communication and overall exchange is far more critical in a startup. In a large company with over 100,000 employees and numerous locations, communication is vastly different than when you're trying to create a space, sometimes more than just an office, where you can communicate effectively."	Other Influencing Factors	Code when organizational aspects are named as an influencing factor
Industry	Industry-related factors that shape or influence communication practices.	"Honestly, I believe the luxury goods industry will be forced to change because otherwise, you simply won't attract people anymore. I'm 31 years old, don't get me wrong, but there's a new generation coming up with very different values. We won't be able to recruit anyone if we don't open up."	Other Influencing Factors	Code when the industry is named as an influencing factor

Generational Aspects	Factors related to the generational differences among employees, which influence communication styles and preferences.	"It’s partly a generational issue, as a significant portion of the senior management, who may come from an older generation, still believes that working on-site is more productive, whereas working from home is not. I think it’s more about creating a concept for corporate culture that can be more strongly supported."	Other Influencing Factors	Code when generational aspects are named as an influencing factor

C. Interview Guides

C.1 Survey Questionnaire

General Information	
Welcome and introduction	Dear participants, as part of my master's thesis for the program "Strategic Communication and Leadership" at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, I am conducting an online survey on the topic of leadership communication in contemporary work environments in the German luxury industry. Your valuable insights will contribute significantly to advancing the understanding in this field. The following survey will take five minutes of your time. Participation is voluntary and the collected data will be used solely for research purposes. Your data will be treated with confidentiality, stored securely and the survey as well as the analysis and evaluation will be anonymous. Please participate only if you are currently residing in Germany and are aged 18 years or older. Thank you for your participation and contribution to my research project. If you have any questions or require further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me at s-jpfeifer@ucp.pt. Thank you very much, Johanna Pfeifer Please click on "**I consent**" if you have understood the information provided above and willingly agree to participate in this study.
PART 1 – Demographic Data and Organization	
Q1	*Are you currently residing in Germany and are you aged 18 years or older?* Scale: (Yes/No) Note: If the question is answered with no, the participant is directed to the end of the survey.
Q2	*Are you currently employed in a German company within the Luxury or Chemical Industry and if yes, which industry are you working in?*

	Scale: (Luxury Industry /Chemical Industry /No) Note: If the question is answered with no, the participant is directed to the end of the survey.
Q3	*How long have you been working in this industry?* Scale: (Less than a year/1-3 years/ 4-6 years/ 7-10 years / over 10 years)
Q4	*Are you currently employed in an office job that potentially allows you to work from home?* Scale: (Yes/No) Note: If the question is answered with no, the participant is directed to the end of the survey.
Q5	*Please select the description that best matches your current position in the company hierarchy:* Scale*:* (Entry-level employee / Mid-level employee / Senior-level employee with decision-making authority / Managerial employee / Executive Management
Q6	*Do you have a direct leader within the company you are working for?* Scale: (Yes/No) Note: If the question is answered with no, the participant is directed to the end of the survey.
Q7	*How do you identify your gender?* Scale: (Male / Female / Non-binary / Rather not answer)
Q8	*Which age group do you belong to?* Scale: (18-25 / 26-35 / 36-45 / 46-55 / 56+)

PART 2 – Determination of the Work Model	
Q10	*On average, how many days per week do you work?* Scale: (1 day / 2 days / 3 days / 4 days / 5 days / 6 days / 7 days)
Q11	*Which work model would you assign yourself to on average? (Apart from occasional and irregular exceptions)* Scale: (On-site (Working 100% on-site) / Remote (Working 100% from home or another external location) / Hybrid (A combination of on-site work and remote work)
Q12	*In your hybrid work model, how many days do you work on site and how many days do you work remotely? (Please make sure that the total corresponds to the number of weekly working days stated in advance)* Scale: (Work days on-site __ / Work days remote __)
Q13	*Of the days you work on-site, on how many days is your leader also on-site, allowing for communicative interaction?* Scale: (0 days / 1 day / 2 days / 3 days / 4 days / 5 days)
PART 3 – Perceived Leadership Communication Note: Please only consider your current experiences with leadership communication within this industry when responding to the following question.	
Q14	*When you think of effective leadership communication in your remote work environment, what qualities or characteristics are important to you? Please name up to three words or short phrases.* Scale: Open question Note: If Q11 is answered with **on-site** or **hybrid**
Q15	*When you think of effective leadership communication in your remote work environment, what qualities or characteristics are important to you? Please name up to three words or short phrases.* Scale: Open question

	Note: If Q11 is answered with **remote** or **hybrid**
Transformational Leadership	
Q16	*On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the extent to which you believe your leader demonstrates the following leadership qualities:* My leader articulates and represents a vision and pursues it with optimism and enthusiasm. (*Inspirational motivation)* My leader conveys pride and respect among employees, fostering a sense of identification with them (*Idealized influence)* My leader represents a trustworthy and energetic role model for the employees. (*Idealized influence)* My leader encourages me to question established ways of solving problems. (*Intellectual stimulation)* My leader understands the needs and abilities of each employee and develops as well as empowers the individual employee. (*Individualized consideration)* *Scale:* 1 – Completely disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neutral 4 – Agree 5 – Completely Agree *Source:* Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (2000). MLQ Multifactor leadership questionnaire. Redwood City: Mind Garden. / Rowold, J., & Heinitz, K. (2007). Transformational and charismatic leadership: Assessing the convergent, divergent and criterion validity of the MLQ and the CKS. The Leadership Quarterly, 18(2), 121-133.
Leadership Communication	
Q17	*Now we will focus on the personal characteristics of your current leader. On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements in this regard:* My leader is sensitive to the needs of others. My leader seems to like devoting his time to me. I am content with the way my communication with my leader is going. My leader and I share an understanding of how we would like to achieve our goals. My leader and I can speak openly with each other. Especially when problems arise, my leader and I talk to each other even more intensively in order to solve the problems. Scale:

	1 – Completely disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neutral 4 – Agree 5 – Completely Agree *Source:* Perceived Leadership Communication Questionnaire (PLCQ) by Schneider et al. (2015) which consists of (Conger-Kanungo scale (CKS) for assessing charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1994) / ELQ: Empowerment Leadership Questionnaire (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades,& Drasgow, 2000) / LBDQ: Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (e.g., Halpin, 1957;Stogdill, 1963) / LMX-MDM: Multidimensional measures of leader–member exchange (Liden & Maslyn, 1998) / MLQ: Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (e.g., Bass & Avolio,1995) / TLI: Transformational Leadership Inventory (e.g., Podsakoff, MacKenzie,& Bommer, 1996; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990)
Q18	*Now think about the communication technologies used by your current leader. On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements in this regard:* My leader effectively uses appropriate communication technology to provide work-related information to our team. My leader primarily uses 'live' communication techniques (e.g., phone calls or meetings) to communicate with our team. My leader uses the communication tools (e.g., phone, email, video conferencing, etc.) that are most effective for communicating work-related information to our team. My leader effectively uses online meeting tools (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Webex, or Google Meet) to provide information to our team in meetings. *Scale:* 1 – Completely disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neutral 4 – Agree 5 – Completely Agree *Source:* Newman, S. A., Ford, R. C., & Marshall, G. W. (2020). Virtual team leader communication: Employee perception and organizational reality. International Journal of Business Communication, 57(4), 452-473.
Q19	*Finally, reflect on your daily communication and interaction with your current leader. On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements in this regard:* Taking into account my leader's workload (e.g. position or workload), I can expect quick answers to my work-related questions. My leader answers me promptly. My leader responds reliably to work-related questions. My leader responds to the communication-related wishes of our team.

	My leader clearly communicates the distribution of work tasks to our team. My leader clearly communicates performance expectations to our team. My leader communicates goals and objectives clearly. My leader communicates with appropriate regularity. 1 – Completely disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neutral 4 – Agree 5 – Completely Agree *Source:* Newman, S. A., Ford, R. C., & Marshall, G. W. (2020). Virtual team leader communication: Employee perception and organizational reality. International Journal of Business Communication, 57(4), 452-473.
Q20	*When you think about effective leadership communication, which qualities or characteristics come to your mind? Please list up to three words or short phrases.* Scale: (Open answer)
Closing	
End of the survey	You have reached the end of this survey. Thank you very much for your participation and your contribution to my master's thesis.

C.2 Employee Interview Guide

Introduction and background	
Welcome and introduction	Hello, welcome, and thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. My name is Johanna Pfeifer, and I am studying Strategic Communication and Leadership at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa.
Interview context and outline of topic	This interview is part of my master's thesis on leadership communication in contemporary work models. The aim of this thesis is to compare the aspects of leadership communication perceived by employees in their respective work models and to link them with leaders' assessments of communication in the context of different work models. Here, the aim is to identify factors that influence the perception of leadership communication on behalf of both employees and leaders and to draw possible comparisons or discover entirely

	new aspects. This thesis thereby focuses on the luxury industry and the chemical industry as a benchmark.
Description of duration and procedure	This interview will last approx. 30 minutes, and my questions will be open-ended so that you can share your experiences and points of view openly and freely. There are no correct or incorrect answers. It is only important for the success of this study that you answer the questions honestly and diligently.
Reference to the declaration of consent	The interview is recorded in order to be replayed and transcribed for analysis. All data will be treated confidentially, and your statements will be anonymized. Do you agree to this?
Clarification of open questions	Do you have any unanswered questions before the interview begins? If so, you are welcome to ask them now.
Start of the interview and recording	Then let's get started. The recording starts now. [*Start recording*]
PART 1 – Background information on the person and organization	
Introduction	Before we start, I have a few questions about you and the organization you are working in.
Personal and company details	Could you please tell me about the organization you work for and the industry this organization is associated with? *Follow-up questions:* - May I ask how old you are? - Which gender do you feel you belong to? - What is your current job title/position? - Which work model are you working in, hybrid, remote or on-site? - How long have you been working in this work model?
PART 2 – Perception of Leadership Communication	
Introduction	Let us now begin with the thematic part of this interview. This part is about the general perception of leadership

	communication and your opinion on leadership communication in your work model.
Importance of leadership communication	How would you describe the importance of leadership communication in your organization?
Strategic leadership communication	Do you feel that your employer is adopting a strategic approach with regard to communication between leaders and employees in various work models (hybrid, remote, on-site)?
	Are there any communication related practices or strategies that you believe are particularly prevalent or impactful in your work model? *Possible follow-up questions:* - If yes, why are they particularly important?
Perceived leadership communication	What are aspects that you consider as particularly important concerning the communicative exchange with your leader in your work model?
	From the following terms, which ones do you consider particularly important concerning the communicative exchange with your leader in your work model? *Newman and Ford (2021)* - *Communication Responsiveness* - *Communication Frequency* - *Communication Predictability* - *Communication Clarity* - *Communication Mode* - *Technology*
	In your opinion, are there any additional key factors influencing your perceived leadership communication effectiveness in your work model? *Possible follow-up questions:* - If yes, in a positive or negative way? - Which aspects lead to that positive or negative evaluation?

PART 3 – Communication Challenges	
Introduction	After having discussed the topic of leadership communication in general, we will now move on to possible challenges and solutions with regard to leadership communication.
Challenges in leadership communication	What are (if existing) some of the main communication challenges you encounter with regard to leadership communication in your work model?
	How do you think leaders could overcome challenges to maintain effective communication and support team members more effectively?
	Does the strategic approach applied by your leader include the regular obtaining of feedback with regard to existing challenges?
PART 4 – Tools and Practices	
Introduction	Next, I would like to know more about your assessment of communication tools and practices and their practicability in your work model.
Use of Tools and Technologies	What tools or platforms do you rely on most for communicative exchange with your leaders?
	Which technologies or tools have proven to be particularly effective or ineffective in supporting leadership communication in your work model? *Possible follow-up questions:* - Why are those particular tools applied? - Are there feedback possibilities provided by the leader?
Leader Communication Practices	Does your leader take additional measures to promote collaboration and cohesion within your team, especially in an increasingly digital work environment? *Possible follow-up questions:*

	- If yes, which measures?
PART 5 –– Future developments and recommendations	
Introduction	Now we come to the final part of this interview, which concerns improvements and future recommendations.
Recommendations for the future	Based on your experiences, what suggestions do you have for improving leadership communication in your work model?
	Are there any specific changes or initiatives you would like to see implemented to enhance leadership communication effectiveness?
Future outlook	What factors do you think will play an increasingly important role in leadership communication in the future?
PART 6 – Final questions	
Introduction	We have now reached the end of the thematic questions in this interview.
Clarification of final questions	Is there anything we haven't covered yet, but that you feel is crucial to the topic of leadership communication in contemporary work environments? Are there any other aspects or thoughts you would like to share with me?
End of recording	Thank you, I'll stop the recording now. [*Stop recording*]
Closing	
End oft he interview	We have reached the end of the interview. Thank you very much for your time and your valuable insights. You've contributed a lot to the success of this research.
Further procedure and contact	After our interview, I will transcribe and anonymize it in order to subsequently evaluate and analyze the collected interview data. If you are interested, I would be happy to contact you after completing the work to send you an excerpt of the results. If you have any further questions or suggestions, please feel free to contact me at any time.
Farewell	Thank you very much for your time and goodbye!

C.3 Leader Interview Guide

Introduction and background	
Welcome and introduction	Hello, welcome, and thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. My name is Johanna Pfeifer, and I am studying Strategic Communication and Leadership at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa.
Interview context and outline of topic	This interview is part of my master's thesis on leadership communication in contemporary work models. The aim of this thesis is to compare the aspects of leadership communication perceived by employees in their respective work models and to link them with leaders' assessments of communication in the context of different work models. Here, the aim is to identify factors that influence the perception of leadership communication on behalf of both employees and leaders and to draw possible comparisons or discover entirely new aspects. This thesis thereby focuses on the luxury industry and the chemical industry as a benchmark.
Description of duration and procedure	This interview will last approx. 30 minutes, and my questions will be open-ended so that you can share your experiences and points of view openly and freely. There are no correct or incorrect answers. It is only important for the success of this study that you answer the questions honestly and diligently.
Reference to the declaration of consent	The interview is recorded in order to be replayed and transcribed for analysis. All data will be treated confidentially, and your statements will be anonymized. Do you agree to this?
Clarification of open questions	Do you have any unanswered questions before the interview begins? If so, you are welcome to ask them now.
Start of the interview and recording	Then let's get started. The recording starts now. [*Start recording*]
PART 1 – Background information on the person and organization	
Introduction	Before we start, I have a few questions about you and the organization you are working in.

Personal and company details	Could you please tell me about the organization you work for, the industry this organization is associated with and your role within this organization? *Possible follow-up questions:* - May I ask how old you are? - Which gender do you feel you belong to? - What is your current job title/position? - Which work model are you working in, hybrid, remote or on-site? - How long have you been working in this work model?
PART 2 – Perception of Leadership Communication	
Introduction	Let us now begin with the thematic part of this interview. This part is about the general assessment of leadership communication and your opinion on communicating in different work models.
Importance of leadership communication	How would you describe the importance of leadership communication in your organization?
Strategic approach on leadership communication	Are you following a strategic approach regarding leadership communication with employees in contemporary work models (hybrid, remote, on-site) and if yes, how would you describe it?
Perception of leadership communication in contemporary work models	In your experience, what are the key factors that contribute to effective leadership communication?
	In your opinion, how does leadership communication in hybrid and remote work environments differ from traditional office work? *Possible follow-up questions:* - Which aspects are particularly important in which work model? - Why are these particular aspects so important in this work model?

	Compared to communication in office environments, which factors do you consider as particularly important when communicating with employees in remote and hybrid work models?
Strategic leadership communication	What types of communication strategies or practices have you employed to lead and motivate your team, especially regarding hybrid and remote work models?
PART 3 – Communication Challenges	
Introduction	After having discussed the topic of leadership communication in general, we will now move on to possible challenges and best practices with regard to leadership communication.
Challenges in leadership communication	What challenges do you perceive in effectively communicating with your employees in each work model?
	Can you provide examples of those challenges that you have successfully overcome leading employees in different work environments?
Leadership communication in virtual environments	Do you think that leading employees in a remote or hybrid work environment poses greater challenges compared to office work? *Possible follow-up questions:* - If yes, why?
Strategic approach	Do you regularly adapt your communication strategies or approaches to address these challenges and maintain effective leadership communication in each work model? *Possible follow-up questions:* - If yes, how?
PART 4 – Tools and Practices	
Introduction	Next, I would like to know more about your assessment of communication tools and practices and their practicability in terms of your leadership role.

Leadership communication tools	Which technologies or tools have proven to be particularly effective or ineffective in supporting the communicative exchange? *Possible follow-up questions:* - Why are those particular tools applied? - Is the suitability of the tools regularly updated? - Are there feedback possibilities provided?
Leader communication practices	What additional measures do you take to promote collaboration and cohesion within your teams, especially in an increasingly digital work environment? *Possible follow-up questions:* - If yes, which measures?
PART 5 –– Future developments and recommendations	
Introduction	Now we come to the final part of this interview, which concerns future developments and recommendations.
Assessment of future developments	How do you see the future of leadership communication in relation to hybrid, remote, and on-site work models?
Future outlook	What factors do you think will play an increasingly important role in leadership communication in the future?
Recommendations for the future	What recommendations would you give to other leaders to improve effective leadership communication in hybrid or remote work environments?
PART 6 – Final questions	
Introduction	We have now reached the end of the thematic questions in this interview.
Clarification of final questions	Is there anything we haven't covered yet, but that you feel is crucial to the topic of leadership communication in contemporary work environments? Are there any other aspects or thoughts you would like to share with me?
End of recording	Thank you, I'll stop the recording now. [*Stop recording*]

Closing	
End oft the interview	We have reached the end of the interview. Thank you very much for your time and your valuable insights. You've contributed a lot to the success of this research.
Further procedure and contact	After our interview, I will transcribe and anonymize it in order to subsequently evaluate and analyze the collected interview data. If you are interested, I would be happy to contact you after completing the work to send you an excerpt of the results. If you have any further questions or suggestions, please feel free to contact me at any time.
Farewell	Thank you very much for your time and goodbye!

D. Interview Transcripts Employees

D.1 Interview 1

Interview: 01
Role: HR Specialist in Compensation and Time Management
Company: BASF
Duration: 26:48 min
Date: 06.06.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: First, let me start with questions about your personal background and your organization. Could you tell me something about the organization you work for and the industry in which the organization operates?

P01: It's the chemical industry. The organization, BASF, is the largest chemical company in the world with, well (…) I would say over 100,000 employees worldwide. At the Ludwigshafen site, we have nearly 40,000 employees, a quite large unit based in Ludwigshafen.

I: Wonderful, and what is your current job title and position?

P01: I am an HR Specialist in the area of Compensation and Time Management and, yes, I am technically responsible for the topic of collective bargaining pay.

I: And what work model are you employed in? Do you work fully remote, hybrid, or completely in the office?

P01: I work 90 percent remotely.

I: Alright, and how long have you been working in this model?

P01: I have been in the chemical industry for 36 years and in this work model basically since COVID, so around 2020.

I: Okay. Now let's move on to the thematic part, which is about your perception of leadership communication and your general opinion on leadership communication in your work model. As an introductory question, what role does leadership communication generally play? Is communication with your supervisor generally important to you? How would you assess this?

P01: It plays a very significant role. Coordination, even from home, works very well through Teams. We have a team meeting every two weeks, and otherwise, we have regular spontaneous exchanges. If any issue arises that requires coordination, we handle it. So, I have regular communication with my supervisor.

I: So, would you say that your supervisor also takes a strategic approach to communication with employees? Like scheduling regular meetings to ensure communication?

P01: Yes. Either with Teams or on-site, we have a team meeting every two weeks, with about 15 colleagues, where we meet regularly every 14 days on-site. Or we set appointments in between when necessary. This is managed very flexibly and spontaneously depending on the case. And as I said, there is constant communication.

I: I understand. Given that you are now working fully remotely, is there an approach that you find particularly important in your work model?

P01: Regular communication with supervisors is crucial in remote work. In HR, there are many issues that require consultation. In such a large company, many cases arise, and in my role as the subject supervisor for the topic of compensation in the tariff area, there are many touchpoints and questions that require coordination. This happens spontaneously, and it is important, but it works wonderfully with Teams.

I: Alright. Now a general assessment of a few terms I will mention regarding leadership communication. I would like you to assess which of these terms you consider more or less important in your work model, or how you would prioritize them. The first point is response behavior, meaning the responsiveness of the supervisor. We have the frequency of communication, the predictability, the clarity of communication, the chosen medium, such as email, in-person meetings, phone calls, and video conferences, and technological prerequisites. Of these points – I will repeat them again – just assess what is more, less, or perhaps particularly relevant in your work model. So, response behavior, responsiveness, frequency of communication, predictability, clarity, and technological conditions.

P01: Well, let me briefly outline my thoughts. I believe that when working remotely, it is essential for the technical infrastructure to function properly to ensure that spontaneous meetings via Teams can be held. This also ensures planning capabilities, allowing for scheduling appointments, confirming or canceling them, and coordinating dates. It is also important to be able to expect that a manager will respond or, conversely, if a supervisor identifies a need for action and requires information, they should still be reachable, even while working from home. This is crucial. Communication clarity must be present, regardless of whether one is working remotely or on-site. However, it is important that communication can occur, that appointments can be arranged, that people can be seen, and that there is flexibility on short notice. The technical setup needs to be adequate. Teams has become well-established over time and works excellently for this purpose.

I: Very good. Regarding communication clarity, would you say that clarity might sometimes suffer due to remote work? Would you assess that when communicative exchange is not adequately ensured, the clarity of communication becomes even more critical, especially when people do not meet face-to-face or communicate only virtually?

P01: I would say that clarity can still be maintained. Even when working remotely, I can write emails, send messages, and communicate via Teams, without necessarily needing a virtual face-to-face connection. Clarity is indeed important and a fundamental requirement, regardless of the working mode. Particularly when not on-site, where one might accidentally

encounter someone or go next door to the office for a brief exchange on a specific topic, even if it was unplanned, these spontaneous opportunities are lost. In remote work, more planning is required. Although one can still attempt to call spontaneously, it can be more challenging when schedules are tight. Nevertheless, remote work allows for scheduling appointments and maintaining contact regularly, daily if necessary, depending on what is required. It requires a willingness from both supervisors and everyone else involved to keep communication active. A challenge arises with new employees and onboarding. For someone who is new, it is beneficial if the team is on-site, as new employees can better understand how the organization functions and how processes work, which can be more difficult remotely.

I: That's a good transition to the next question, which concerns communication challenges. In relation to your work model, what communication challenges do you encounter with remote work?

P01: Before COVID, I would have said that it would never work and that it wasn't feasible. However, during the COVID pandemic, when we couldn't go to the office, we managed to handle all sorts of projects, establish company agreements, introduce short-time work, and complete complex tasks—remotely. This experience clearly showed that remote work can be effective. In terms of efficiency, which is a major concern for me, eliminating commuting time—nearly two hours a day—allows that time to be used for work instead. You start working earlier, and overall, remote work is significantly more efficient. For example, at the large plant in Ludwigshafen, where it takes ten to fifteen minutes by car to reach a meeting point, these meetings can now be held remotely with just a click. These benefits far outweigh any potential drawbacks. Therefore, I wouldn't say I see any significant disadvantages. The main issue is that you don't see your colleagues in person as often, which impacts opportunities for spontaneous face-to-face interactions, such as lunch meetings and cross-departmental exchanges. This is somewhat diminished. Therefore, it's important to be on-site occasionally—not only for team meetings but also, when necessary, to interact with colleagues in person. Spontaneous on-site meetings should be possible when needed.

I: Do you think it's necessary for the manager to initiate efforts to bring the team together?

P01: Yes, but it can also come from the team members themselves. Ideally, the initiative should come from both the manager and the team members. While the manager can start it, it's also important for employees to have the desire to see their colleagues in person from time to time.

I: Are there any ways in which you believe a manager could contribute to making communication within a team that works remotely or with various work models more effective?

P01: Yes, in our case, managers have actively sought feedback on the preferences of team members. Open communication is crucial. For example, we ask about the team's sentiments and opinions. We decided, for instance, that we will predominantly work remotely. However, there are two or three colleagues who prefer to work on-site because they do not have a suitable workspace at home or cannot work quietly there. They prefer to be on-site, while the rest of the team has the flexibility to work either remotely or on-site. The fixed

point is the team meeting every two weeks. Additionally, there is a consensus within the group that if a pressing issue arises, there should be a willingness to come on-site spontaneously to address it. This approach is feasible and has been implemented effectively.

I: That's an interesting point about managers asking for feedback. My next question was whether there are feedback mechanisms that allow team members to reach out to the manager and communicate such concerns.

P01: Yes, managers periodically ask for feedback on team opinions. Additionally, team meetings provide an open forum where team members can raise any issues or suggest changes. This ensures that there is always an opportunity to address problems or propose improvements. The communication is entirely open, which works very well.

I: That's good. The next point concerns the assessment of communication tools and practices. What tools or platforms are used for communication? For example, is it Teams, the platform we're using now? Are there other communication platforms as well?

P01: Standard practice is MS Teams. It is the primary tool we use for all meetings and remote interactions. It is exclusively used for these purposes.

I: Okay. Are there any additional measures taken by the manager to foster team cohesion in the digital environment?

P01: We have a team meeting every two weeks that is always held on-site. Apart from that, we use video conferences via Teams for any intermediate topics or group discussions. This is standard practice. Whether it's within our team or with colleagues from other departments, these interactions typically occur through Teams online.

I: Understood. Now, for the final part of the interview – future developments and recommendations. Do you have any suggestions based on your experience working remotely with your manager that could improve the process? Or areas where leadership communication could be made more effective? Or perhaps any wishes or comments?

P01: Remote communication has improved steadily over the years since the pandemic began, as it has become more prevalent. People have gained experience, and we handle these topics very efficiently. However, there are occasional technical interruptions, typically due to insufficient data or inadequate connections, which could be more stable. Overall, in terms of efficiency, I think it works very well.

I: Also, from the perspective of leadership?

P01: Yes, also from the leadership perspective. Both sides – managers and employees – have gained experience. Some colleagues prefer to work on-site and feel more comfortable there, as working from home can feel more isolating. However, the majority, at least in my environment or the one I work in, are pleased with the option to work remotely. This flexibility is especially valuable for balancing work and family commitments. Initially, the learning curve was quite steep for everyone involved. However, for jobs where remote work is feasible, it has become a well-accepted practice. Of course, in production roles, remote

work is less viable as employees need to be physically present. But for those who can work from home, it is a beneficial option, and most people appreciate it. Efficiency has been achieved in this setup.

I: Okay. Is there a factor you believe will become more important? Is there anything related to leadership communication, particularly virtual leadership communication, that you think will require more focus or will play a larger role in the future?

P01: One essential aspect that remains crucial is the need for personal interaction, especially with new employees. As I mentioned earlier, when onboarding new staff, it is important to make an effort to meet in person at least in the initial weeks or months. For onboarding new employees, it is vital to do this on-site. It's important for newcomers to understand the organization, particularly in a large company like BASF. For someone working in a smaller unit or in IT, where individuals might work more independently, it might not be as critical. However, for a typical role where it's important to know colleagues from adjacent departments and understand cross-functional processes, it's essential that new employees spend substantial time on-site during their initial period in the company.

I: Yes.

P01: This will remain a relevant issue in the future because onboarding someone remotely is challenging.

I: I understand.

P01: At least in a context like BASF.

I: Yes. Wonderful. This concludes the thematic part of the interview. Is there anything we haven't covered that you would like to add on this topic?

P01: No, nothing.

I: Alright. I will now end the recording.

(Farewell and Closing Remarks)

D.2 Interview 2

Interview: 02
Funktion: Compensation
Unternehmen: BASF
Dauer: 36:32 min
Datum: 07.06.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: To begin with, let's start with questions about the person and the organization. Can you tell me a bit about the organization you work for and the industry it operates in?

P02: Yes. The company is BASF, a large chemical company based in Germany. I work in the Compensation department.

I: Wonderful. And what kind of work model do you follow?

P02: I would say, 90 percent of the time, I work in the office.

I: In the office, okay. Now moving on to the thematic part. What role does the communication with your supervisor play in your professional work?

P02: In my case, it plays a minor role. I work fairly autonomous. We do have occasional contact with management to receive updates on what is currently going on, but thematically, it is quite rare that we need to coordinate specific issues thematically.

I: Okay. Do you feel that there is a strategic approach to communication, or does it happen more informally?

P02: There doesn’t seem to be a clear strategy here. Strategic management should involve aiming for specific goals, but it appears that management focuses more on ensuring our current tasks run smoothly rather than engaging in strategic planning. Therefore, I don’t feel that there is any strategic management taking place here.

I: Do you have regular meetings that are organized or scheduled by your leader, or do you arrange these meetings among yourselves?

P02: There are team meetings organized by higher management, but these are often just for general updates and don’t usually provide detailed information that is crucial for our daily work. They are useful for general awareness, but not always necessary for our daily tasks.

I: I: Okay. Do you feel anything is missing in this regard? Would you prefer a different approach? For instance, should the role of the leader in communication be more significant?

P02: Not really because we coordinate ourselves within the team. Our management has various topics to handle, but within our team of three or four people, we coordinate among ourselves, so I don't feel that anything is lacking.

I: Okay. That's interesting and a valid response.

P02: Yes, it's just that different people have different needs. Some require management and can only work effectively with it.

I: Yes. Are there any specific aspects of communication that are particularly important to you, or any preferences regarding how communication takes place? Since you are all in different work models, but still have some form of regular exchange, what factors are important to you for effective communication?

P02: It works well for us because everyone is on a similar level. So, it doesn't matter much to me whether someone is working in the office or from home. For onboarding new employees and similar matters, it's different. If someone has questions, they should be able to reach out to colleagues, and it should be timely enough to establish contact. Whether this happens online or in person, it works well at the moment.

I: Okay. I will now mention a few terms regarding characteristics of leader communication, and you can indicate whether they are more or less important in relation to communication in your work model. Response time and availability, meaning the speed or immediacy of responses.

P02: It is important, of course, but it's not always possible.

I: Frequency of communication?

P02: It is important because I prefer to resolve issues quickly rather than waiting until I can reach someone.

I: Okay, that also touches on the next point: predictability and planning, meaning knowing when to expect responses. The medium of communication, such as email, in-person meetings, phone calls, or video conferences.

P02: It's important for me to receive a response, regardless of the method. Whether the exchange happens via email or Teams doesn't matter. If I can resolve an issue quickly through Teams chat, email, or another method, that's fine with me. In-person communication is ideal, but written communication works as well.

I: Okay. And technological requirements?

P02: In today's world, they are very important.

I: Now, for the third part – challenges in communication. Do you see any particular challenges in communication with your leader in your work environment?

P02: Yes. We're back to the issue of availability. In the past, everyone worked in three or four rooms together, so you could quickly pop over to a colleague and resolve something. That's a major issue currently.

P02: Yes.

P02: Availability is not always guaranteed.

I: And I assume this also affects your assessment of communication effectiveness.

P02: Exactly, definitely.

I: I understand. What do you think could be done – either by the team or by the supervisor – to address this issue?

P02: For me, personal presence on-site is definitely important.

I: So, you would prefer that this happens more regularly.

P02: Yes, exactly. It should occur more frequently than it currently does.

I: Okay. Do you have opportunities for providing feedback? For example, if you believe something could be improved, is there a way to communicate this to your supervisor so that changes might be made?

P02: Yes, there are definitely opportunities. The question is what the issue is and how it should be communicated. Typically, for larger issues, it is done in writing. Nowadays, if no one is available, we create an email distribution list and say, "Hello, supervisor, there is an issue here. What's the next step?" Again, this relates to the issue of availability—sometimes you can't just knock on a door.

I: I see. Would your supervisor be the person you would approach with such feedback, or is this something that tends to be handled independently of the supervisor?

P02: It depends on the issue. We have a certain area of competence where we can make decisions ourselves. When it goes beyond this area, we need to communicate with the supervisors.

I: Understood. Moving on to the fourth part, the use of tools and technologies. Generally, which platform do you use most for communication, and which one is most important to you?

P02: The most important platform is, as mentioned, personal interaction. However, currently, MS Teams is the preferred tool. We also use other platforms like Webex, but those are not used much anymore. So, MS Teams is currently the tool of choice.

I: Okay.

P02: But as I said, I prefer personal communication.

I: Yes. And that is indeed a valid perspective. Are there any additional measures at the technological level that could enhance team cohesion? For example, regular technological check-ins that are not work-related, to facilitate social interactions within the group?

P02: Technologically, I wouldn't say there are any measures that would bring significant benefits. I can't think of any.

I: Okay. Do you have any general suggestions for improving leadership communication?

P02: Definitely, personal accessibility – being physically present on-site. Also, the accessibility of supervisors, who are often stressed, have no time, and are booked with numerous appointments, leading to inaction. Accessibility, whether through technology or otherwise, is crucial. For me, having a supervisor who is personally present has a much stronger impact. For instance, if you are on-site and the door is open, you can quickly exchange information. When working from home, there are large blocks of time scheduled, and nothing is possible. Therefore, personal accessibility is always top for me.

I: That's interesting. So, your supervisor works in a different work model than you?

P02: Yes, our supervisor works from home. Sometimes, you don't even know if they are present. They might be there, but have appointments in offices far away, and you are not aware of it.

I: Yes, that's an interesting point. It highlights that if the supervisor is working remotely or in a different work model, it can complicate communication. What do you think the future holds for the development of the work environment and communication with supervisors?

P02: Personally, I think it depends on the nature of the work. For some colleagues, working from home is great. However, I believe that for teamwork and communication, being on-site is essential. You only get a sense of current issues and what is happening on-site if you are physically present. Therefore, for me and the situation overall, including for the company, I see it as more beneficial if employees are on-site more. Personal interaction is better if people are present.

I: Okay. A nice conclusion. We've reached the end. Is there any point we haven't discussed or any thoughts you would like to share?

P02: No, I've said everything. Just one more thought, for example, regarding leadership – f I were to consider myself as an experienced leader in this field, I would find it dreadful to onboard my employees online.

I: Yes, very challenging.

P02: We have a colleague who has been here for two years now. However, he also works from home, doing so two or three days a week. This might also be interesting for your interviews; perhaps you should include him as well.

I: Yes, that would be great for me.

P02: Unfortunately, that's how it is. One might take an hour or two, if at all, to schedule an MS Teams meeting and try to pack in as much information as possible. Otherwise, the person gets no information at all. Eventually, it becomes clear that it is not ideal to be so rarely present, especially during the onboarding phase, which lasts one to two years or even longer here.

I: Yes, yes.

P02: We have many events that happen only once a year or every two months, and then they are over. You miss out on things, like conversations with colleagues, on-site coordination—you can't just call across the desks.

I: Yes.

P02: And I see this critically because it affects the quality. We work with many HR business partners, and many are onboarded with only partial knowledge. I find it very, very difficult. The quality is noticeably declining. For example, whether working on-site or not. We send out information about certain regulations, and then I get the same question from the same unit three times. One person says they saw the email, another has discussed things on-site, and it goes back and forth. So where is the effectiveness? It is very, very questionable. The communication that is missing with the leadership is also missing within the teams that are thematically related, and that is the issue.

Effectiveness definitely suffers when things are communicated multiple times or when people don't know the communication channels. You also don't build personal relationships in the same way. And it feels like onboarding that happens online doesn't take place as effectively as in person.

I: No, definitely not. And it's possible that this will increasingly move toward virtual communication and remote work, which indicates how things might look in the future. Perhaps there will be no connections anymore, and everything will be virtual.

P02: I believe that is the trend and it will likely happen. The question is, how does this contribute to effectiveness, and what does it actually do for my company?

I: Yes.

P02: It works if everyone is at the same level or standard, where you can say, hey, they're all on the same page. But when it comes to knowledge transfer, it is very, very difficult.

I: Yes. Thank you very much for your insights.

P02: Thank you, I'm glad that someone is asking for my opinion (laughing). The topic is very interesting.

I: That was the last question in this interview. Is there anything else you would like to add or anything we haven't covered yet?

P02: No, I've said everything.

I: Alright. Then I will now end the recording.

*(Farewell and Closing Remark**s**)*

D.3 Interview 3

Interview: 03
Role: Payroll Accountant
Company: BASF
Industry: Chemical
Duration: 41:24 min
Date: 11.06.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: I would like to start with some background information about you. What is your current job title and the name of the organization you work for?

P03: Yes, sure. I am working as a Payroll Accountant. I have been in this position since 2013. Before that, I was in Compensation Management. I have been with BASF for 30 years now. So, I've experienced quite a bit.

I: Impressive. And how do you work? Do you work mainly remotely, on-site, or in a hybrid manner?

P03: Mostly from home remotely, and every two weeks I go to Ludwigshafen (location of the company).

I: Okay. How long have you been working this way?

P03: Since 2020, since COVID.

I: Since COVID, understood. Now, moving on to the topic of leadership communication or its general role. Would you say that communication with your supervisor plays a significant role in your job and daily work?

P03: Actually, no. I operate relatively autonomously. I consult in individual cases, yes, but overall, we don't have regular work discussions with our supervisors.

I: Okay, so there aren't any communication-related strategies like weekly or very regularly scheduled meetings, video conferences, or other things?

P03: No, we have a team meeting every two weeks where general topics and issues are discussed. But other than that, no.

I: Okay. Generally, if this is a secondary aspect for you, that’s completely fine. In your communicative exchange with your supervisor, are there any aspects that are particularly important to you?

P03: I think it depends on each individual's working style. Some people want a bit more assurance. I’m the type who considers myself experienced enough to make and take responsibility for my own decisions. Of course, there is coordination in your case or even a kind of… well, "debate" might be too strong a word, but you might discuss how your supervisor would have approached something differently. But essentially, it’s about being able to justify your decisions, and as long as you can do that, it's acceptable to those involved.

I: Okay, so would you also say that the desire for autonomous work and less supervision from the supervisor is respected? If you say you don't need this kind of general supervision, is that perfectly acceptable to the supervisor?

P03: It also partly depends on trust and knowledge, right? If my supervisor had too much insight into my area of work, she would probably get more involved.

I: Okay. Apart from technical matters, are there any other organizational or procedural requirements, like regular contact with the supervisor, or are there other departments in the organization responsible for these aspects? Are there other communication channels within the company? How is that organized?

P03: Well, the tasks that come to me are fortunately quite varied. I can say that I have a certain recurring part, but the majority involves dealing with new problems or challenges. Naturally, this involves interactions with other departments, such as labor law or finance, and so on. Generally, I am mainly responsible for payroll accounting.

I: Okay. I'll throw out a few terms related to leadership communication. An interesting aspect in your working model, given that you work primarily remotely, would be which aspects you find relevant and which you don't.

P03: Okay.

I: So, even if it might be less relevant for you in some aspects, just give a rough assessment of how you see it. Response behavior and readiness to react of the supervisor, the frequency of communication – I've already gathered that this is less necessary in your case. Predictability and planning, meaning knowing when and how a response will come or how reliably the supervisor can be reached, clarity of communication between you, the medium used, such as when to use an email, an in-person meeting, a phone call, or a video conference, and technological conditions.

P03: Do you want me to address your questions in detail or just provide a general assessment? Yes, no, or on a scale?

I: If you have a ranking or just an assessment, yes or no, that would be more than enough.

P03: Okay, got it.

I: What do you think about response behavior and readiness to react? Important, less important?

P03: Yes, that's important because when you have something on your plate, you want to get it resolved as quickly as possible.

I: The frequency of communication? Just for the record.

P03: Less important. The frequency might be maybe twice a week.

I: Predictability and planning, meaning being able to roughly estimate how quickly your supervisor will respond and whether you can rely on a quick response?

P03: The response time ranges from immediately to maybe one or two days. Yes, relatively quickly.

I: Relatively quickly. Are you satisfied with that? Would you say it's important to you that the response is relatively fast?

P03: Yes, of course. It mainly depends on the scheduling of my supervisor. Generally, it also depends on the communication method. If I make a request via MS Teams, for example, it comes relatively quickly. But if it’s too cumbersome to go back and forth 25 times, and I ask for a call, it might take a bit longer. Because a call has to work for both me and my supervisor, and that makes it more challenging.

I: Okay, good point. The medium of communication in general. I mean, I’ve already heard that Teams plays a very large role for you. But would you also say that communication channels such as email, in-person meetings, phone calls, and video conferences are also important?

P03: Yes, that’s important as well. For example, I use email when multiple people are involved. I prefer not to have communication go through multiple channels; instead, when communication needs to occur between two, three, or four parties, I like to use email distribution lists. I wouldn’t do that with MS Teams.

I: Okay. And generally, technological conditions are also significantly more relevant in remote work, ensuring everything functions smoothly. Would you say that this is important to you and does it work well for you?

P03: For example, internet reliability works very well. In the early days, before COVID, when I was working from home, some things didn’t work as well. I would get logged out of various systems or frequently experience disruptions. Somehow, there was an improvement in reliability and stability. Since COVID, it has been better. I assume something was changed in terms of availability.

I: Yes, okay. So, you would say there has been a positive development.

P03: Very much so. And the technical requirements can vary from employee to employee. I have a relatively good bandwidth. My internet connection is quite stable, and the internet speed is also relatively high.

I: Okay, very good. The third thematic part of the interview is about communication challenges. This is particularly interesting in a remote work environment because there are many opinions on what makes it complicated or difficult. From your perspective, what are some communication challenges you might face in your working model? Are there any?

P03: Yes, I think this has improved somewhat with learning to use these media. In the beginning, it felt like everything was a bit chaotic. But over time, I've learned from meetings and realized that if I have something to say, I can raise my hand. And if the moderator or organizer manages the process well, everyone gets a chance to speak in an orderly manner. It was a bit disorganized at first. Also, with meetings, it has helped us, especially in the size of BASF. For in-person meetings, we sometimes had to leave half an hour early because of the distance within a building, from the start to the end of a meeting. With remote work, I can join a meeting right on time or even a minute early, which helps.

I: No time loss. Yes, that's an interesting point.

P03: The challenge is also this connected work. For example, Jürgen and I are across from each other. If something comes up, we used to quickly call over the desk. That's not possible now because you're not constantly in meetings. Instead, you send a quick message. He writes to me, I write to him, asking if there's a moment to talk. Then we have a quick phone call. That's possible, but these very short interactions are lost. Also, networking, yes, it's somewhat neglected.

I: Would you say that this affects the exchange of information in general? Or the quality of the information being shared? For instance, we discussed onboarding in another interview. How would you evaluate that?

P03: When you mention onboarding, do you mean new colleagues who are joining us?

I: Exactly, new colleagues and also just the exchange among you. The topic of information transfer.

P03: And of course, it also depends on the area of work. Since I work relatively autonomously in my area, it's less of an issue for me. However, Jürgen has his advisory role and needs to interact with his colleagues who have similar responsibilities. He's essentially the decision-maker. When his colleagues come to him, they need his input. So, his work area has more connection with other colleagues than mine, for example. I handle payroll management for Berlin, and for me, it doesn't really matter whether I'm calling Berlin from my home office or if I'm in Ludwigshafen.

I: Yes, okay. Yes, that's interesting.

P03: I think it also depends somewhat on the living situation. I have a colleague who prefers to come to the office because, I believe, his situation at the beginning of the pandemic was that he was working at an ironing board. That's suboptimal (laughing).

I: Suboptimal.

P03: This is my own dedicated office here, and no one bothers me.

I: Yes, you definitely notice a huge difference. That's clear. Do you think there's an aspect of this entire networking and communication structure where the supervisor could contribute to making it more effective, or do you think it's something you resolve among yourselves?

P03: I think we resolve these things among ourselves. Of course, I inform the supervisor about certain developments or points, but that's expected. It shouldn't function any other way. Mhm. But in my opinion, remote work is primarily based on trust.

I: Yes, okay. That's a good point.

P03: One impression, maybe just a brief look into the past. I always had the impression that the supervisor thought if you work from home, you're not actually working. That you're just sitting around doing nothing. But the supervisor doesn't have those insights even if I'm sitting next to them in the office, right?

I: Yes, that's true. And especially because it's no longer so common for the supervisor to work in the same model as you do. That creates new conditions, right?

P03: Yes. But also, the aspect of work-life balance, right? That's a very strong aspect. I believe that if I want to attract new people, it's important for them that they can work from home occasionally, even if not all the time. Yes. Because if I have a company where the supervisor insists on me being in the office every day and I end up spending, say, 45 minutes in the morning and another 45 minutes in the evening commuting, that affects my personal time as well.

I: Definitely, yes.

P03: Right? I think if I'm currently in the office, yes. In view of the shortage of skilled workers, I can imagine that a company or a modern company has to adapt in this regard.

I: Yes, definitely. Especially for the generation after mine, Generation Z, where it has to be a given.

P03: Yes. For a position to even be considered.

P03: I think it's really a generational issue. That's my opinion. Because it's not a problem, but rather a specialty, let's put it that way. Yes. I'm obviously from a different generation than you. For me, it was always about getting things settled as quickly as possible, like building a house and so on. And when new people are hired with us, we always do an introduction, and so on. Yes, absolutely. Then we try to cover everything, see what comes up. You ask your friends, right? And, I think other aspects come to the forefront, like working first, earning money, and so on. Understandable, Johanna, understandable.

I: Definitely, definitely.

P03: And if I take the story about commuting time as free time into account, you need about 45 minutes each way, that's an extra hour and a half of free time per day.

I: Yes, it doesn't necessarily mean that you work less in that sense.

P03: When the pandemic started in 2020, we faced huge challenges. Various issues came up from time to time. On one hand, there was the issue of COVID-related absences. Then there was the question of how to manage finances when employees were isolated at home. Next came the infection protection laws, a drop in production, and the topic of short-time work benefits. I even worked on Saturdays and Sundays because the data was needed the following Monday. That meant more work and more hours. But once these special tasks were resolved, and normal work returned to the desk, you work just as much as before, but in less time. This is because you're not distracted. I no longer have a commute. Of course, if you say you don't have a commute, as in Ludwigshafen, where team meetings take place, there's a lot of catching up. You might not work as much in a day because you chat with one colleague or another. But fundamentally, if the scope of work remains the same, you work just as much, only more efficiently.

I: Efficiency, that's a good point. Would you say that there are also feedback opportunities from the supervisor regarding how you want to shape this? Or is there a regular check-in, especially now that many people are working remotely and the team doesn't come together as often, to gauge satisfaction with this?

P03: No, that's not really asked. But in my employee appraisal, I did express my gratitude for the opportunity to work from home. It's not something I take for granted. And that's why I'm also willing to quickly get work done when needed. With the supervisor, it's the same. If necessary, it's not a problem for me to work until 8 PM. I'm also a bit flexible here. Usually, I start working around 6 or shortly after 6 in the morning. Early riser, I guess. But I make sure to finish around 5 or 6 in the evening.

I: Yes, which allows for self-management.

P03: And a benefit is also that if I need to handle something urgent for work-life balance, like going to a government office, I can fit it in between work. Otherwise, with tight office hours, such as with administrative or general authorities, you'd have to squeeze it in somehow, like leaving work early or driving home earlier. It's true, yes. Driving, which is also important considering the distances, both economically and otherwise.

I: Yes. Definitely. Do you handle such things yourself or do you need to coordinate with the supervisor?

P03: We handle it ourselves.

I: Okay, understood. Now, in the fourth part about tools and practices, the tools you use. Which platforms do you rely on for communication with each other and with the supervisor?

P03: Yes, mainly MS Teams and also email.

I: Teams and email, okay. Would you say that anything has gained more relevance since you started working remotely, compared to before, or has it remained relatively unchanged?

P03: It's remained unchanged for me. Yes.

I: And, exactly, we've almost covered this in the previous questions, but does the supervisor take any fundamental measures to promote this further, such as weekly or bi-weekly meetings that take place in the office? Are there any other activities, aside from these meetings, to bring the team together, or is it really only when you're physically in the office and interacting?

P03: No, we mostly handle it on an as-needed basis. For example, if I have actual points of contact with other colleagues in our team, we'll arrange a short call. So, we manage all that ourselves. Our supervisors, at least from my personal perspective—though I know others feel a bit more monitored—don't check if we're present. For instance, on MS Teams, you can set your status to available, busy, and so on. That helps to some extent. But there's no pressure like, "Okay, what am I going to do now? I'm on yellow, meaning away, for half an hour; maybe my supervisor thinks I'm slacking off." I think in the past, older supervisors might have held that view. I had the impression that older supervisors thought people weren't working. It was always a sort of underlying feeling. Whether they actually thought that or not, I'm not sure.

I: Yes, that's a good assessment and I believe that many people felt the same way, especially in the early stages. Regarding future development, how would you evaluate it? Are there any aspects of your work or remote work that could be improved? Perhaps

in terms of communication or with your manager? Is there anything you think could be better managed?

P03: I can't think of anything at the moment.

I: That's perfectly fine. If things are going well, that's also a good thing.

P03: I agree. I actually think it's been good how things have developed since COVID. We've obviously faced significant restrictions due to COVID, but it's been a positive development, and I believe this is somewhat expected by employees.

I: What would you say, and this is actually the last question, how do you think things will develop in the future?

P03: Well, it might also be a generational issue. At the moment, I'm somewhat lacking a vision of how things will develop. I keep thinking about the evolution of smartphones or artificial intelligence, and so on. I currently lack the imagination to envision how things will progress. However, I'm also curious to see how it will unfold because, just compare a smartphone from ten years ago to one now—there's been such incredible advancement in storage capacity and functionality. It's hard to imagine what's next. What I am particularly interested in is the application of AI.

I: Good point. AI could definitely play a very significant role and is indeed a major focus of technological development in this area.

P03: I think it's also important to consider employees' attitudes. Yes, exactly. And how this will evolve. I want to stay informed; I'm interested. But I believe that as some people approach their sixties, they might think, "Okay, I'm nearing retirement, I don't necessarily need to concern myself with this anymore." They might decide to just get through the last two or three years without having to deal with AI and other emerging technologies.

I: So, would you say that, in that sense, a kind of generational shift might be necessary in the job market at some point to better align with technological advancements and the use of new technologies?

P03: Mostly, I agree. There are certainly older employees, including myself, who are resistant to technological development. But I think there are also plenty of younger employees who are content with the current state of things, staying within their comfort zone, and anything that changes is seen as challenging. However, I would generally argue that the older generation tends to be more resistant compared to the younger generation because they know they will have to deal with more technology throughout their careers.

I: Yes, definitely.

P03: And it’s also known that if you fall behind, you get left behind.

I: Yes, and so much has become a prerequisite to even remain competitive in the job market. Especially when it comes to different work models, would you estimate that things will increasingly move towards remote or hybrid models in the future? More than they are now?

P03: I believe so. More towards hybrid.

I: More towards hybrid, I understand.

P03: Because at the moment, as you can see, you’ve interviewed two or more people at BASF. Frank sees it quite differently. He says, for example, that when he puts on his shirt, he's in business mode. When he’s at home in a T-shirt, it feels like a leisure mode and he just works a bit on the side.

I: Yes, I understand. Alright, that was the last question. Is there anything we haven't covered or something I didn't ask that you think would be relevant?

P03: I think what's also important to me is the ecological aspect. Being able to largely avoid using a car is significant. This helps reduce emissions. That’s an important point for me. I use less fuel, fewer tires, and the car doesn't wear out as quickly. This has an impact even in my personal life. What else? For me, I use my private IT equipment, like my monitors and so on, but I'm also willing to invest in that because I get the opportunity to work remotely.

I: Yes, okay.

P03: I also think that, speaking personally, people are often more willing to stay home if they have a cold or something. Many people might think, "I don’t want to infect others, so I’ll stay home and work." And I believe that if I’m sitting on a couch with a runny nose, it could just as well be at my desk. Definitely. And I won’t spread germs to others. For example, if Jürgen and I are sitting opposite each other, there’s a risk of infecting him, and if Jürgen gets sick, it might be worse for him. This is also economically relevant because it reduces the employer's need to pay for sick leave.

P03: Yes. And in a way, it’s a give-and-take situation, where you say, "I’m happy to use my private equipment and contribute something if the employer gives me this flexibility."

I: Okay, a very good point. That concludes the survey, thank you very much. I will now stop the recording.

302 *(Farewell and Closing Remarks)*

D.4 Interview 4

Interview: 04
Role: Collective Bargaining
Company: BASF
Duration: 44:35
Date: 11.06.2024

1 (*Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)*

2 **I:** Okay. I'll start with something general. Could you briefly tell me about the
3 organization you work for and the industry you're involved in?

4 **P04:** Sure. I work in the chemical industry, specifically in the human resources
5 department. My role focuses on collective bargaining agreements, and I advise various
6 company divisions on these issues. Unfortunately, we no longer have the governance
7 to enforce strict regulations, so we operate in an advisory capacity regarding all
8 collective bargaining measures for the Ludwigshafen (company location) site.

9 **I:** Okay, great. What is your current work model? Are you working remotely, hybrid,
10 or on-site?

11 **P04:** Actually, I work in a hybrid model. Before joining my current department, I
12 worked almost exclusively from home during the pandemic. I found this model quite
13 beneficial, as it offered several advantages from an employee's perspective. There were
14 no commutes, no traffic, and no need to travel to the office. I could start my day earlier
15 and have the flexibility to work extra hours if needed. Since starting in the HR
16 department, I've been working in a hybrid arrangement. I go to the office up to three
17 times a week. My fixed home office days are usually Monday and Friday, just like
18 today. This model is influenced by the collegial environment we have. Personally, I
19 would be open to a higher percentage of home office work, as I've seen significant
20 improvements in communication and management over the years. However, our team
21 has a high on-site presence because some colleagues live very close to the office,
22 making it easier for them to come in. To sum up, I currently work in a hybrid model,
23 with up to three days in the office.

24 **I:** Did this start with Corona or before Corona?

25 **P04:** No, when Corona began, I was still working in transport management for our
26 company, and I was on-site every day. There was no home office at all. When Corona

broke out, we had to pack everything up quickly and move to home office. The first one or two weeks were a bit uncertain, with questions like how it would work and whether we would lose contact with each other. But by 2020, 2021, and partly in 2022, it settled in, and from my perspective, it worked out very well.

I: Yes, okay. That's interesting. So, Corona was the trigger, right?

P04: Absolutely, absolutely. Without Corona, our company might not have progressed as far in this area as it has now.

I: Yes, okay. Moving on to the thematic part, what role does leadership communication play in your organization? How important is communication with your supervisor or supervisors?

P04: Honestly, from my role or from our collective bargaining team's role, it's relatively minor because we work quite independently. We have our fixed responsibilities and contacts, mostly internal, and we interact and exchange with them without needing direct supervision for our daily tasks. In case of problems or questions beyond our competence or responsibility, we do contact our supervisors. We have a model where we have two supervisors, which you might have heard about—it's a special model practiced here. But in our daily work, we have less interaction with them.

I: Okay, okay. Would you say that even if you don't meet often for work-related matters, there is a strategic approach by leadership regarding communication? For example, do they set up regular meetings or exchange meetings related to different work models?

P04: So, this exists. Quite early on, when things started to ease up around mid to late 2022, we took relatively early action. When it was possible to have in-person meetings with groups again, we also introduced fixed office days. On those days, the whole team would come together—the entire crew that our leaders are responsible for would meet there. Initially, I don't know if it's still the same, but at first, we met every week. I think it was always on a Tuesday or Wednesday, with different thematic focuses. Nowadays, we meet every two weeks, which is because we consolidated the meetings from weeks 1 and 2 into one day. There was also the request to compress it again, to have it every two weeks, so everyone comes to the office on that day. The rest of the time (…) we have many colleagues who hardly show up on-site.

I: So, the employees essentially expressed the desire for this, right?

P04: Yes, but we also had a very open and collaborative directive from our leaders. To introduce this team day, to meet regularly so we don't lose that interaction, to see each other every now and then. Have lunch together.

I: Yes, I understand.

P04: And beyond that, we actually have the offer that the door is always open if needed. So, we can always go to our leaders, and so far, they haven't really let us down within the scope of what they can do.

I: Okay, that's an important point. I just need to ask; what work model are the leaders following?

P04: It's relatively varied, I think. It's also more hybrid, sometimes this way, sometimes that way, but without fixed days. When they have on-site appointments, like participating in committees and so on, they might be there on Mondays or Thursdays. So, it's a bit unpredictable for us as regular employees, but they are also working hybrid.

I: Yes, okay, that's interesting because having fixed office days doesn't necessarily mean that the leaders are always there, but when you have these meetings in the office, the leaders also join on those days.

P04: Definitely, they are always there on those fixed team days, except for vacations or illness. Otherwise, both are always present. And as I said, they also follow this hybrid model themselves and are very open to the whole topic. I'm personally glad that we don't have strict rules saying, "You must come in on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday." Instead, they say, "Choose the model that works for you, where you can work together as a small team, and make sure everyone is there on the team days." That's the only fixed requirement we have. They don't pressure us, partly because they follow this model themselves. They understand that we aren't just sitting around playing on our phones or watching Netflix; we are actually doing our work. They trust that it's working.

I: Yes, okay. You mentioned some interesting terms, such as trust. Would you say there's a particular aspect in the communication with your manager that is especially important in a hybrid work model, or that you place more value on in your interactions with your leader?

P04: Good question. Personally, as an employee, I value that my manager is available when I need them – that they are reachable. Whether I'm physically standing in front of them and saying it face-to-face, or if I know that my manager is reachable through Teams or other means, is relatively indifferent to me. What's most important is knowing that someone is there if issues arise, which is beneficial not just from a personal standpoint but also for the overall process, especially when quick solutions are needed. Whether this is face-to-face, via phone, Webex, or another method, I'm quite open to it. It's probably also a matter of personal preference. Our team has members who need

physical presence and the informal interactions that come with it, while I'm more comfortable managing on my own. So, it really depends on the individual.

I: Yes, that's interesting. Very person specific.

P04: Exactly, how it's lived out.

I: I'm going to throw out a few terms. We'll go through them one by one, and you can tell me which you consider particularly important or less important in a hybrid work model, or where you would place more focus. I'll list them all first. The first is response behavior; the frequency of communication; the predictability or planning of communication, knowing when to expect a response; the clarity of communication; the communication medium, such as when to use an email, an in-person meeting, a phone call, or a video conference; and technological conditions, like the tools used for communication. So, for response behavior and responsiveness, would you say it's important or less important in a hybrid model?

P04: Important, definitely. Yes, important.

I: Frequency of communication?

P04: Well, as I said, it's somewhat influenced by personal preference – less important, I'd say.

I: Understood.

P04: We don't necessarily need daily exchanges to perform our work effectively.

I: Yes, clear. Predictability and planning of communication?

P04: It's important. From my perspective, it's important to be able to connect when needed. However, I haven't encountered a situation yet where this hasn't worked out in some way. Both sides – whether it's the leaders contacting me or me contacting them have worked well.

I: Okay, so it works well, which is also a valuable insight. And the clarity of communication?

P04: Yes, it's there, but of course, it can vary depending on the topic. If you're asking if it's always clear, the answer might be longer than expected.

I: No, not at all. Every insight is important.

P04: Good. We have topics where we used to have a governance function. We could enforce regulations strictly, approve, or reject things. Now, we're moving more towards a consulting role, where we suggest the ideal path but allow deviations at our clients' own risk. This sometimes makes things more challenging for us. We, as regular employees, follow our regulations and try to enforce them up to a point. If the counterpart doesn't agree or comply, which should align with the company's intent, issues can escalate to our leaders. Often, the leaders end up making concessions, not necessarily in a negative way, but saying, "If you want to do it this way, you can, at your own risk." It's frustrating and sometimes impractical, but if that's what you want, go ahead. This can sometimes lead to communication not meeting our expectations, but it's not due to the communication itself—it's about the content and the constraints we face compared to what we ideally need to maintain our standards.

I: Yes, okay, that's interesting. So, this is a completely new aspect. The communication also depends on the specific topic at hand. What would you say about the communication mediums?

P04: We have all the mediums we need. Personally, I don't have a company phone, but we use Microsoft Teams, email, and WebEx for communication. Aside from remote work, we also have the option to meet in person two or three times, which allows for face-to-face discussions. From a resource's perspective, everything needed for communication is in place.

I: Yes, and I assume you would say that plays an important role as well.

P04: Absolutely, having the right tools available is essential.

I: Yes, and that ties into the technological conditions.

P04: Exactly. They are interlinked. From my perspective, everything needed for daily work is provided. BASF has made significant progress in recent years. While there were always some individual cases where remote work was possible, the digital transformation at BASF got a significant boost due to Corona. The company was somewhat pushed into taking action. We've now eliminated physical phones and rely solely on digital tools like WebEx and Microsoft Teams. The company has made strides in flexibility, and I think they've made up for a lot in recent years due to necessity.

I: Yes. Are there any communicative challenges with a hybrid work model, where you find it more difficult or less straightforward compared to working in the office?

P04: Yes, there are indeed challenges, particularly with written communication. While our focus is on leadership, it's a general issue that one must be careful with written communication to avoid misunderstandings.

I: Yes.

P04: It's always a sender-receiver issue. It can be challenging to clearly communicate with your manager on a written basis, and similarly, when interacting with HR or other employees, it's important to avoid confusion. Clear communication is crucial – conveying regulations effectively without making the message so complex that it becomes unclear, leading to misunderstandings or complications. For more complex or difficult issues, a verbal conversation, whether face-to-face or over the phone, might be a better choice to ensure clear communication.

I: Yes, and that naturally affects effectiveness in the end, both in communication and in work overall.

P04: Exactly.

I: Okay, that's a very interesting point that hasn't been mentioned before. How would you say leaders could better support this to address such challenges? From what I've gathered, the choice of communication mediums is a key factor.

P04: Yes, that's crucial. Leaders could definitely help, but this ties into the point I mentioned earlier about our regulations. If our role were more restrictive—meaning we had more of a directive function rather than a consultative role that allows for a lot of flexibility and discussion platforms—things might be clearer. A stricter role would mean working with more defined guidelines instead of allowing numerous deviations. While this might not be something a leader can directly influence in person, having clear tasks, responsibilities, and regulations from the top down would certainly simplify daily communication with business partners.

I: So, to prevent many different strands from causing confusion, and to avoid situations where discussions go in circles or become obsolete after some time?

P04: Exactly. Or where what was agreed upon becomes irrelevant after six months, and you have to start the discussion anew. Yes, that's exactly it.

I: Yes, okay, that's interesting. Are there any feedback mechanisms promoted by the leadership to ensure that employees can express their concerns if things aren't going as they'd like?

P04: Yes, definitely. We actively use our bi-weekly team days for this. The morning is divided into two meetings. The first is with the entire team—our focus areas are Compensation and Time Management. We all come together, and both Time Management and Compensation colleagues can speak about what's going on with the team or within BASF as a whole. After that, we have a smaller discussion within my team, specifically within the Compensation team, covering both non-tariff and tariff

issues. Here, we have the opportunity to raise concerns if, for example, a particular area is facing significant issues. We can also provide general suggestions for process improvements. If, for instance, there's an issue with special payments or something is running poorly, we can suggest technical or content changes. We always have the chance to speak up if we're willing to do so.

I: Yes, that's wonderful and it sounds like it's actively encouraged by the leadership.

P04: Absolutely. We also have a protocol that's written up each time, with a different person responsible for leading it. We keep track of points and sometimes create outcome reports to review what has happened a few weeks later. This way, nothing falls through the cracks. Otherwise, if we discuss something in a team meeting and revisit it in eight weeks, we might not remember if all the points were addressed or not.

I: That's a good point – not just collecting feedback but also following up to see if anything has been done.

P04: Yes.

I: Okay, that's interesting. The next part is about tools—specifically, which communication tools are used. Which tool or tools do you rely on most for communication?

P04: For daily business, email is still our primary communication tool. We receive inquiries from HR business partners, as well as team updates and process information from our managers, so everything ultimately gets channeled through emails. The second most important tool is definitely the phone—meaning WebEx or Microsoft Teams for voice calls.

I: Okay, do you have more phone calls or actual video conferences?

P04: Due to the situation, it's mostly video conferences. If someone turns on their camera, it tends to create a sort of mutual expectation that everyone should do the same, so it often escalates in that way. Classic voice-only calls are becoming increasingly rare.

I: Yes, that's good to hear.

P04: It's nice because you might work with someone for two years without ever meeting them in person, and then when you see them in the cafeteria, you can wave and say hello. It makes a difference.

I: Definitely. Would you consider any of these tools particularly crucial for hybrid work?

P04: Yes, email is fundamental and is a standard part of our toolkit, so it's not really in question. But Microsoft Teams is definitely the most important communication tool for hybrid work.

I: Yes, okay.

P04: I actually use Microsoft Teams less when I'm on-site because I can usually see my colleagues directly. However, for hybrid work, Microsoft Teams is the primary communication tool, aside from email, which is essential at all locations and for all job functions.

I: And does the leadership also implement other technological measures to strengthen team cohesion? I mean, aside from the on-site meetings where everyone is present in person, are there any virtual meetings set up, like coffee chats or similar, that are specifically initiated by the leadership, or is that more something that happens among the employees themselves?

P04: Generally, it's more something that happens among the employees themselves. Our leadership doesn't organize casual get-togethers that aren't work-related, like virtual coffee chats or similar for general social interaction. Personally, I don't feel the need for such activities, so I don't miss them. What we do have are other workgroups where we engage in topic-specific discussions with a few colleagues. These discussions occur regularly, aside from the bi-weekly on-site meetings, and focus on project progress or other relevant topics. So, there are regular exchanges, but they are specific to work-related matters rather than informal social interactions.

I: Okay, understood. Moving on to the last section of the interview, which is about future developments and trends. Just a general assessment: is there anything that needs improvement or could be done better in terms of communication in hybrid work?

P04: That's a good question. Overall, I'm relatively satisfied with the technical setup we have. We used to have a tool called Webex, which you might be familiar with. With Webex, we could make landline calls, so we could communicate outside the company quite easily, similar to how we did with traditional landline phones. However, in our role, we have fewer interfaces with that tool.

I: Yes.

P04: It would be simpler if, for example, Microsoft Teams could also support external communication.

I: Yes, I see.

P04: Well, then Webex could be used. Right now, we have email, Webex, and Microsoft Teams. Teams is mainly for internal communication or for video calls like the one we're having now. If the company were to integrate external communication capabilities into Microsoft Teams—something we've touched on before, possibly related to licensing issues or ongoing contracts with Webex—that would be ideal. That way, everything we need for our work would be available in one place. We are also currently in the process of digitizing our file system. Previously, we used Microsoft's file storage to save documents and such, but we are transitioning to SharePoint in the coming weeks and months. This will make things a bit more digital and simpler in terms of the interface. So, efforts are being made there as well. Overall, I'm satisfied with the tools available for daily work and communication with leadership.

I: Okay. But it's an interesting point that if this external communication function could be integrated, it would simplify the variety of technologies we need to use, which would be preferable for you.

P04: Yes, I think so.

I: Is there something that should be initiated by management? Is there something you would say management could do or is there anything missing, or are you completely satisfied with the current level of communication necessary for your job?

P04: From my personal perspective, I'm actually quite satisfied with how things are running at the moment.

I: Okay. And the last question in this interview, looking to the future: hybrid working is currently the most widely used work model, at least in Germany. What do you think it will evolve into? Do you believe remote work will become an even bigger role, or do you have any insights on this?

P04: I could actually see remote work playing an even larger role. Depending on team composition and the type of job, it might increase. I mean, this is something only we office workers can manage, whereas someone in a field-based role is tied to on-site activities. However, I could imagine that there might be a resurgence in the need for physical presence if employees, generally speaking and regardless of the company, continue to act responsibly and perform their tasks well. Additionally, if managers, irrespective of the company, recognize that things work well even without direct supervision—meaning, I don't need to be physically present to oversee everything. Also, considering our company, BASF, we are closing some buildings; Jürgen might have mentioned that we are moving again soon.

I: Yes.

P04: When trying to consolidate different units in the Project Mosaic, so that not just one unit occupies an entire floor in a building– there's a lot of wasted space – it ultimately has financial benefits for the company as well. Employees working from home consume their electricity and water there. For us as employees, it means we don't have to spend time commuting. Also, as we discussed in internal communications before, there have been fewer sick leaves because if you feel a bit off, you might think, "I can't go to the office and sit there for eight hours," but then you might think, "Hey, I can wear my jogging pants and keep the thermostat at 28 degrees, so I feel really cozy and can still do my work from home." Personally, I could imagine that this topic will gain momentum or at least not revert to requiring daily office presence. I hope BASF has the flexibility and trust to continue with this approach and doesn't feel the need to bring everyone back on-site for any reason, whether due to management issues or otherwise. Ultimately, it must be noted that our company has let things slide in recent years, including capacities. Cafeterias have been closed, buildings have been gradually shut down. For instance, if you arrive at BASF's gate around 8:20 AM, you can barely find a parking spot because the parking garage is almost completely closed. These issues make it almost impossible, from my perspective, to create an enjoyable workday like it was six, seven, or eight years ago. There have been either neglected or restricted facilities due to decreased demand. If we were to suddenly ramp up again, I believe we would need to take numerous measures to manage the capacities effectively.

I: Interesting point. So in that sense, it's almost difficult to go back because everything has shifted to remote and virtual work, and the on-site work environment and necessary conditions are no longer there.

P04: Yes, from my perspective, it's definitely not the same as it was in 2018 or 2019 before the whole COVID situation. Back then, everything was fully occupied. You had your fixed workspace, you almost always had the chance to park well even if you arrived later, if you came by private car. Everything was equipped—there was running water, sanitary facilities that needed to be cleaned, consumables available, printers and other equipment. There were cafeterias that didn't immediately overflow when everyone had to go there. And now, we barely have printers, for example. We still need paper documents in our daily work, like personnel files that need signatures. There is still a certain amount of paper required, even though it has been significantly reduced. But now, for 25 people, there's one device that just sits there, which isn't ideal. The company has managed to save a considerable amount of costs, including on consumables, water, and electricity during the pandemic. Everything came at the expense of the employees, without compensation, like receiving a flat 50 euros or something similar. Less heating was needed in the winter, equipment was dismantled, etc. From a financial standpoint, employers have already benefited because the laptops we use now were already available before. It's nice that they were purchased additionally, but new equipment wasn't really needed for that.

I: That's interesting. Would you say that if this trend continues and if the hybrid model remains popular, or even trends more towards remote work, is there a particular skill where you think managers need to improve or focus on to keep things running smoothly in the teams?

P04: Actually, it's about having trust in employees. That's something we notice in our team now; there is trust, and they know it works. But I've also seen, even in my previous role in transport management, that we had a manager who was confident it worked, understood the processes, and knew things were running smoothly. During COVID, we didn't have any fixed team days or anything. We sometimes didn't see each other for weeks, but it worked because he trusted us to do our jobs, and we trusted him to be there if something went wrong. However, in partner departments that did similar tasks for different clients, it was clear that the effectiveness really depended on the manager's behavior. Some managers need to see their employees, need to see that 20 people are there, whether they are playing Counterstrike on the computer or not—they need to see them physically present and accessible if needed. This is a valid approach if you see that remote work isn't working, but as long as the work is done and not requiring constant follow-ups, like having to call someone 20 times because they are sitting on the couch watching Netflix, then that trust should be there. On the flip side, employees also sometimes have to work more independently, especially when you can't quickly discuss things over the desk or just pop into the boss's office. You have to adapt to working more autonomously. I think this trust and a more flexible approach to management, including work hours, are important. It's not necessary for someone to be present from 7 AM to 4 PM; if they start at 10 AM and finish at 8 PM, that should be fine as long as the work gets done. I think it would be desirable for managers to understand this. Otherwise, we might end up restricting ourselves too much again and losing the freedoms we have now. For example, we became parents three months ago, and it's great to have the flexibility to handle personal matters like a doctor's appointment. I just inform my colleagues, say I'll be away from 1 PM to 1:30 PM, and then let them know when I'm back. I don't need to inform my manager specifically. I log out, take care of the appointment, and come back. It's not far from my home to the office, but with traffic and bridge delays, it can take up to 45 minutes. This flexibility improves quality of life and time for employees, and I hope the trend doesn't revert to requiring on-site presence as mandated.

I: Yes, because it doesn't really contribute to efficiency in the end, does it?

P04: Exactly. Regarding efficiency, if I leave the house at 7:15 AM to be at the office by 8 AM, I'm already at my computer at 7:15 AM.

I: Yes, exactly.

P04: Yes, I mean, you don’t necessarily work less just because you’re working from home.

I: Maybe even more.

P04: The trend is actually more towards working more because you think, "Oh, I have to finish everything before I leave," especially when relying on public transportation with its fixed schedules.

I: Yes.

P04: And this way, you can say, "Well, I’m here now; if I’m five minutes late, it’s not a big deal working from home."

I: Yes.

P04: So, I think it brings many advantages.

I: Yes.

P04: But, as I said, opinions differ. Some people live right near the office, while others don’t have the possibility at home to have a dedicated workspace like here; they might have to work at the kitchen table or an ironing board—there are some wild stories out there. So, it’s also likely tied to what you mentioned earlier: a skill that’s becoming increasingly important for managers is understanding people. Knowing what each person needs and where their advantages lie, which could make the hybrid model a lasting solution because it accommodates everyone to some extent.

I: Exactly, right. It’s a compromise that works for everyone. Everyone benefits and also fulfills their obligations.

P04: Exactly. The 2-3 model can be arranged in various ways, like with your team meetings. It can be adapted for everyone, and the rest can be decided freely, which is a great solution.

I: Absolutely. That concludes the interview. That was great. Thank you very much.

P04: I’m glad I could help. You’re welcome.

I: Yes, it was a very good interview. Is there anything else we haven’t discussed or anything else you’d like to add on this topic?

P04: I can’t think of anything right now, no.

I: Alright, I’ll end the recording then.

404 *(Farewell and Closing Remarks)*

D.5 Interview 5

Interview: 05
Role: Digital Marketing Manager
Company: LVMH
Duration: 30:17
Date: 17.06.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: Very good. So first, about the person and organization. Could you briefly tell me the company you work for, your position, and what kind of work model you are using?

P5: What exactly do you mean by work model?

I: Do you work in a hybrid, remote, or on-site model?

P5: Okay, perfect. I work at LVMH. I'm in digital marketing, and I would describe my work model as hybrid.

I: Okay. How long have you been working in a hybrid model? Is this something that developed since COVID, or did you work differently before?

P5: I started working after COVID. This is my first job, so I jumped straight into the hybrid model. If I can refer to the past, before LVMH, I had different experiences. I did an internship entirely from home, and I worked in a job before where I was only in the office and had no home office. So, I'm familiar with all three work models.

I: That's interesting and it's always good to have multiple perspectives. Do you currently work more remotely than on-site?

P5: Yes, I'm in the office twice a week and work remotely from home three times a week. It sometimes happens the other way around, but most of the time it's like that, you could say.

I: Now on the topic of the perception of leadership communication. How would you describe the role of leadership communication in your current job? Does it play a significant role? Is the interaction with your superior important?

P5: Yes, it is very important to us. We don't have strict hierarchies in our company. However, we naturally have defined leadership personalities. We work very closely together in a small team. Our team is led by our marketing manager, from whom we receive a lot of strategic information. Therefore, leadership communication is very important for all of us in the team to get the information we need to work effectively. I would say that without team leadership and leadership communication, something would be missing, and we wouldn't be able to work properly.

I: I understand. Do you feel there is a strategic approach to leadership communication from your leader?

P5: Do you mean how she communicates with us?

I: Exactly. Strategic in the sense that communication is planned and not always spontaneous. There is a feeling that planned exchanges take place and that the communication steps from the leadership are actually planned.

P5: Yes, definitely. We've brought in a bit more structure since our team has grown. I think you don't need as much organization and structure when the team consists of one or two people. Now, some are working from home, some are in the office, and some are traveling. It's very important to take the time to come together as a team. We've noticed this recently, and our leader has responded to it. We now have a regular team meeting, without exception, once a week. Of course, if someone is sick or on vacation, they don't have to attend. But otherwise, it's always on time, at the same time. It’s not rescheduled. It’s an appointment where you don’t schedule doctor’s appointments or other meetings because it's important to all of us to come together as a team, but especially for our manager to give us all the information from the other departments. We also share our questions with her or among ourselves, as needed. In addition to this planned, regular exchange, we also have the opportunity to go to our manager anytime, ask questions, and talk to her. So, this is something unplanned that we can do spontaneously when a question is urgent. It’s an open-door policy. We go into her office and just ask what we need to know. If we're working from home, we call or send a message via email or Teams. So, we have quite different communication channels. But yes, besides our team meeting, we don't have individual fixed appointments with our boss. This can be set up if needed. It's an initiative from the team. But she doesn't schedule this unless she has a topic she wants to discuss.

I: Okay, and do you all work in the same work model?

P5: Yes, we all have the possibility to work remotely. We are all in the office every Tuesday, so the whole LVMH team is in the office on Tuesdays, which is our office day. Apart from that, we can take our home office days and office days flexibly. If I'm in the office on Monday and Wednesday, but the rest of my team is in on Thursday and Friday, this office day on Tuesday ensures that we still see each other. On the other days, it might happen that we don't meet in the office at all.

I: Yes, okay. So, would you say that this one office day is a strategic and important tool to ensure that you come together and that communicative exchange among you remains?

P5: Yes, definitely. When we got the email saying we would establish this, I thought it was really cool because I immediately saw that it makes sense. Especially with the long commute I have, I come to the office to see others. And if you come to the office and no one is there, it's annoying because you're there to interact with others. So, that was definitely a strategic tool from our leadership team to improve communication. I would definitely confirm that. I don't know if it's the most important thing. I think, for our

small marketing team, our weekly jour fixe is a bit more important because it's just about our team and doesn't involve everyone else. But it all ties together. We also have this jour fixe meeting on Tuesday when we're all in the office. So, this team meeting always happens in person. So, I'd say both complement each other.

I: So, for the virtual part of your workweek, you don't have a fixed meeting scheduled. Everything happens spontaneously, and the face-to-face communication is handled on the day you're all in the office, where the general exchange meeting takes place. Right?

P5: Yes, exactly.

I: Okay, very good. Now, regarding leadership communication in general. When you think of effective leadership communication, what aspects are important to you in your work model?

P5: Good question. Are you more focused on the type of communication itself or what is used to communicate effectively?

I: I'll get into the technological aspects and the tools used later. This is more about factors of effective communication or perhaps qualities that a leader should possess.

P5: Okay. So, I think the most important thing for me in the business area is that people are open with each other and can share feedback. We have a very strong feedback culture. Everyone is open to receiving feedback, and everyone is also open to giving feedback. That's very important when working together. No one is afraid to share ideas, neither with each other nor with the leadership itself. So, I think it's great that we don't have these extreme hierarchies where no one dares or feels in a position to express their own ideas. We have a lot of teamwork, which makes us creative and effective. So, I think it's good that our leader allows this, that she's open to it, and that she brings a lot of transparency. This means she really tries to pass on all the topics that are important to us so that we can do our work. I also find it important to be structured and to know exactly who is responsible for which topics. I think that's an important quality a leader should have. And then there's the whole team dynamic, the togetherness. I think it's also important that a leader keeps an eye on that and isn't just focused on business, business, business. Instead, she should look into the team itself and see what personalities are in the team, what they need, and adapt a bit to the team and not just work in a way that suits her. So, understanding how others work is important. I think all of this is very important to me. There are probably many more things that are important to me, but I think... yes... having an open ear and so on, that's the most important.

I: I understand. So, regarding the remote work time you have and the on-site work time. I'm going to read six terms now, and we'll go through them from top to bottom. You just tell me how important or less important the mentioned aspect is for you regarding

leadership communication in your work model. These are response behavior and readiness to react, frequency of communication, predictability and planning of communication, clarity of communication, the means of communication—meaning when to use an email, when to have an in-person meeting, when just a phone call or a regular video conference—and the technological conditions.

P5: All right.

I: So, responsiveness and willingness to react—how important is that for you in your work model, or is it less important because you all come together once a week anyway?

P5: No, I actually find it very important because it's very important to me to work quickly and not wait half a week for an answer. So, if I couldn't ask my question in our team meeting because it came up two hours later, then I won't wait a week to ask it to my supervisor. Then I'll be persistent and call ten times until my question is answered. So, I find that very important.

I: And what would you say about the frequency of communication?

P5: That's important too, of course. I think you should hear from each other regularly, whether you're in the home office or at the office. I think it's especially nice when you're in the home office to hear from someone at least once a day, just to know, hey, the other person is there. Because you just don't see each other visually. In the office, it's much easier to notice each other without verbal communication because you can just see each other. So, daily communication is very important to me, yes. Whether that's a lot or a little can be debated.

I: Yes, I think it's a matter of definition for everyone. Predictability and planning of communication?

P5: Not that important to me, actually. I think it's cool that we have this weekly exchange as a team, but I wouldn't describe communication with my supervisor as planned. It comes spontaneously. If something is on my mind, I call; if she needs something from me, she calls. Nothing is planned, it comes as it comes in the workday.

I: Okay, good. And the clarity of communication?

P5: Yes, so I believe clarity is very important, but I also think that you need to choose the medium that provides that clarity. Clarity is not something I would complain about not having, but that's because we don't go around in endless loops. If we want to discuss an important topic, we pick up the phone and call each other instead of sending a thousand emails and having that back and forth all the time. That's why I think it's important, and if you're stuck in that loop, then you're doing something wrong and have too little clarity, and therefore cannot work effectively and efficiently.

I: Do you then also link that to the medium of communication?

P5: Yes, it is definitely important when which communication medium is used. I think especially if you work in a larger company, your direct supervisor might be in the office with you but in a different office, and you could still end up sending a thousand emails instead of getting up from your desk and going to the other office. So, whether you're at home or in the office, it is always important to choose the right way and the right medium. Very important.

I: Yes, definitely. And technological conditions? Last point.

P5: Technological conditions (…) yes, very important for remote work, but not so important in the office.

I: I see, okay. This is also somewhat linked to the next part, challenges in communication. Are there challenges in communication with your supervisor where you think it could be better, that it doesn't quite work? Whether it's in the part where you work from home or when you're on-site?

P5: Hmm (…) one challenge, of course, is knowing how my supervisor is currently reachable when working from home, or vice versa, knowing when I am reachable.

I: Yes.

P5: You don't see each other. Sure, you have the green-yellow-red symbol in Teams that might give you a hint, but how often do we have a blocker for our own work time or a meeting we're about to join? So, you don't know exactly what the other person is doing and how available they are for you. I find that in a remote working relationship, there's a risk of choosing the wrong time for communication because, depending on the topic you have, it might require some time and full concentration, and you can't judge as well whether the other person can provide what you need.

I: Yes.

P5: I think that's a challenge in remote relationships. You're also not as present as others in your team. That could become difficult if everyone has a super important topic in their opinion, but the supervisor can't divide themselves into quarters, fifths, or sixths. Then you might get overlooked because you're not visible. That can happen. I also know that if you choose the wrong communication medium in a remote work situation, your messages might not get through. But I think it's just about finding the same flow with your supervisor. You both need to know how to reach each other in the worst-case scenario. Yes (…) I think those are the challenges I see. Sometimes, I catch myself writing an email to my boss, having a chat open in Teams at the same time, and then we call each other. So, there's also the risk of using too many mediums.

I: Yes. Would you say that transparency in a remote work environment needs to be a bit greater because such challenges are more likely to arise there? And that increased transparency could help address this?

P5: Yes, definitely. For example, in a previous job, we shared our calendars. So, we could see the appointments of other people. We can't do that in my current job. But it's easy to quickly check your supervisor's calendar to see if it's an important meeting, if you can interrupt, or if you should send a Teams message or wait. That might help provide more transparency.

I: Yes. And is there anything else, aside from the transparency aspect, that you think your supervisor could specifically do to improve the communication flow within your team or among yourselves?

P5: Hmm (…) Maybe having more regular communication. If someone is working from home, it would be good to check in at least once in the morning. Not to say, "Okay, hello, I'm here now and starting work." Not to monitor work hours, but just to keep in touch. Because, certainly, there are days when we don't have any communication when I'm working from home. That's not meant to be negative. And maybe we don't miss it on that particular day. But perhaps someone else or the supervisor might miss it. That can happen. And I think if everyone at least checks in and sees it as a standard practice, whether at the start or in the middle of the workday, it might contribute to more presence and transparency.

I: Yes, those are very good points. Is there a feedback mechanism in place or is feedback regularly gathered by the supervisor, particularly regarding communication? Do you have the opportunity to address feedback?

P5: Yes, we can provide feedback at any time. We don't actually seek it out that often because we receive it very frequently without asking. So, we always know where we stand with the projects we have. However, if something were to bother us negatively, we could always go to our supervisor and address it. We could use our weekly jour fix for that. We could also schedule a one-on-one meeting on-site or just call if it's something urgent and weighing heavily on us. So, there are definitely enough opportunities, and one also knows that when giving feedback, the supervisor can accept it well, that it is accepted, and, above all, that it is welcomed and heard.

I: Yes. Very good. Moving on to the fourth part, tools and practices used for communication. What is the main tool you use?

P5: So, you mean for communication?

I: Yes, exactly.

P5: We use emails, so Outlook, but I would say the main communication tool is (…) I'd have to think about it (…) probably Teams, because it also handles video calls. But it's very close because we also use WhatsApp and phone calls, and if you consider WhatsApp and phone calls as one tool, then it's very close to Teams. They have more or less the same functions: chat and calls. We switch depending on which device is closest and what's currently open on the laptop. But I think if I had to choose, it would be Teams.

I: Teams, okay. If you had to name a tool that is particularly effective for both the remote and on-site parts of your work model, would it also be Teams?

P5: Maybe. I think so.

I: Okay. Sometimes Google Meet or WebEx are also mentioned.

P5: I'm not a fan of Google Meet, and since I've been working with Teams from the start, I just feel most comfortable with it. I also don't like Zoom anymore, and if a Zoom call is scheduled, which is still an official tool used by LVMH, I think it's quite outdated.

I: Yes, do you think things can sometimes get complicated when there are too many tools serving the same needs? For instance, if you can do video calls on Teams and then use a second tool that does the same thing?

P5: Yes, definitely. Absolutely. We have clearly defined the tools we use. Teams is something we always use internally. For internal meetings, whether within our marketing team or larger ones for Central Europe or with boutiques, it's always Teams. But when we speak with journalists, meaning for external purposes, we actually use Zoom more. So, it's somewhat defined, but ultimately, if it were up to me, we wouldn't need Zoom at all. As you said, I don't see the added value.

I: Okay. That's interesting. Now, for the last part of the interview, future developments. How do you think leadership communication could improve in the future? What factors do you think will play a larger role, especially considering the recent developments in hybrid and remote work? What factors would you say are particularly important for leadership communication?

P5: In Germany, you're hearing more and more that things are shifting back from remote and hybrid work towards the office, which I believe is not well received by younger people who desire a lot of flexibility. But I don't think it's just about age. I think anyone who has enjoyed the benefits of hybrid work, mixing home office and office, appreciates the flexibility it offers. Therefore, I believe leadership communication needs to open up further to these work models and engage with them more. For example, there should be workshops to further educate oneself on how to

provide what employees and teams need, regardless of where they are. So, what channels can I use? How regularly should I communicate? I think it's very type-dependent, but I believe it's worth exploring because this hybrid and remote work model is very interesting, especially when recruiting new employees. So, it's a significant topic, and artificial intelligence, the Metaverse, and other innovations will likely come into play later. Many people are already working on that. But I think a lot of thought should be given to how these work models can persist. Depending on what kind of leader you are, you might need a lot of control, or you might not trust easily. Nonetheless, you need to find your way and not just eliminate these work models to have everyone neatly in the office where you can control them. If you're a control type, maybe you should also reflect on what's going wrong on your part. Trust is essential. But there are also different kinds of leaders, so everyone should consider this to ensure that all work models, regardless of the leader type, are possible because you are capable of communicating with your team through all available channels and means.

I: Yes. That's a wonderful conclusion.

P5: Very nice!

I: That was the last question. Is there anything else we haven't covered or anything you'd like to add on this topic?

P5: No, nothing comes to mind.

I: Then I'll stop the recording now.

(Farewell and Closing Remarks)

D.6 Interview 6

Interview: 06
Role: Accountant
Company: (Anonymous)
Industry: Luxury
Duration: 26:06
Date: 17.06.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: Alright, let's start then. To begin with, can you please tell me something about the company you work for and your job position?

P06: So, I work for a leading luxury fashion brand, specifically in the beauty and cosmetics sector. In my current position, I am an Accountant and have been in this role for about (…) three years now. Before that I worked in a similar role, but for another brand within the luxury industry. Currently, I'm responsible for developing and implementing market strategies as well as monitoring and managing the accounts related to our sales operations. It's not just about the numbers, but also ensuring that our financial practices reflect and support our premium brand.

I: Okay and about your work model, do you work fully on-site, hybrid, or remote? And how long have you been working in this model?

P06: I work fully on-site, this has always been the case for me, even during the pandemic. Theoretically I could take home office days, my company allows it up to two days a week. But I only do it once every month for a day or sometimes not at all. All in all my company still places a high value on in-person interactions, and I prefer this type of working too, so no reason to complain.

I: Okay, very good. And what about the work model of your leader? Is it the same work model you're working in?

P06: My leader works in a hybrid model, actually. He is on site a few days a week and travels a lot, so this also changes from week to week. But he works remotely at least one day a week. I am not going to lie, this setup can be challenging at times, especially in a sector like ours where presence and availability internally and externally are still extremely important. When my leader is traveling or working from home, it does complicate things sometimes, especially when decisions need to be made quickly or when a more personal discussion is required.

I: Yes, definitely. This is an interesting point that I will get back to later on when we're talking about challenges, but first I want to know a bit more about your general perception of leadership communication. What role does communication with your leader play in your daily work?

P06: Communication plays a very important role in my daily work, almost indispensable I would say. We have a lot of different projects with multiple brands and stakeholders where the stakes are high, and everything needs to be executed flawlessly, so for me an ongoing exchange with my leader is essential. And that's what I like about on-site work, it allows for real-time communication, which is crucial for proper coordinating with different departments and addressing issues as they arise and of course ensuring that our strategies are implemented effectively.

I: I understand. Do you feel that your leader is pursuing a strategic approach when it comes to the communication with the team?

P06: Absolutely, if not it simply wouldn't be possible to keep the team together. We are all working in different work models with different work structures so it's important to find times where we are all present in the office at the same time. By now our leader organizes that quite well, but it took some time to adapt after COVID. Although sometimes I would prefer a greater share of office times (…) not only for me but for all of us. But we have a regular meeting once a week where everyone comes to the office and presents the most important topics.

I: Yes.

P06: This ensures that we are all on the same page and connected each other's tasks and topics. Our way of working is very interactive, meaning if someone has a topic, there are always five other departments involved. For example, accounting manages the budget, Marketing provides creative suggestions and coordinates the agencies and Sales is in touch with clients in the field. A lot goes hand in hand. And our leaders make sure that all of that functions in a structured way.

I: I understand. You said that you are working in different work models, is there a work model that is more prominent?

P06: I'm not the only one working fully on-site, there are a few others who do that too. But a big part of the workforce at our location works in a hybrid model.

I: Yes, okay. Coming to the next question, when you think of effective leadership communication, what aspects are important to you in your work model? Is there anything that you perceive vital?

P06: I would say (…) let me think (…). For me, personally, it is crucial that my leader is accessible, also in terms of physical presence. That's what I would consider the most important thing for me. Because it is the only way in which a personal relationship can be developed. I feel that, of course it could only be me but still, that communication in teams or through chat or phone calls is always very brief and topic focused. It leaves no room for a simple "Hey, how has your day been so far?" or "Is there anything causing you trouble at the moment?", you know what I mean? Those small, insignificant interactions might not seem that important but eventually they build trust, which is essential for strong working relationships.

I: Yes, absolutely.

P06: In a meeting room, face-to-face, sitting on a table together, that's when I have the feeling that I can talk openly. Especially when there's a virtual wall between us on many days of the week, getting together, sharing thoughts and ideas, talking openly, makes a big difference for me to keep the connection up. I also think it's important to mention that these in-person interactions often lead to more creative problem-solving because you can bounce ideas off each other in a way that isn't as fluid in a virtual setting.

I: That's totally fine if that is what came up when you thought it. On to the next question, I'm going to read six terms to you, and we'll go through them from top to bottom. You just tell me how important or less important the mentioned aspect is for you regarding the communication with your leader in your work model.

P6: Alright, understood.

I: Responsive behavior, frequency of communication, predictability, clarity of communication, communication mode – meaning when to use an email, when to have an in-person meeting, when just a phone call or a regular video conference – and the technological conditions.

P06: Okay, very good.

I: Starting with the first one, responsive behavior, important or not that important?

P6: Very important. On-site but even more when communicating virtually to keep the effectiveness high.

I: And frequency of communication?

P6: Very important, I think I already emphasized that before. Personal contact and continuing communication and exchange is essential for me, on a daily basis if possible. Of course, that doesn't always work but it simplifies the work processes and gives me

a feeling of being part of the team, even though we're not working from the same location at times.

I: Predictability of communication?

P6: Less important in a way that I would rate continuous exchange and spontaneous communication higher than fixed meetings. But still I'm a big fan of meetings in presence, so I do appreciate having a certain level of predictability when it comes to our weekly meetings. It provides a structure that we can all rely on.

I: And the clarity of communication?

P6: I consider clarity very important. Being clear and transparent is especially required when different communication channels are mixed – which happens a lot when people are working in different work settings and from different locations.

I: Medium of communication?

P6: That connects to it, very important. Today something is discussed in the office, the next day further information is shared on teams and the day after someone writes an e-mail, and so on and so on.

I: And the last point, technological conditions?

P6: Also important. Of course, I'm not relying on it as much as someone who is working from home, if I have a problem with my laptop I'm going to the IT department next door and it will be fixed. That is different when people are working remotely. But it builds the foundation for communication between all of us so (…) yes, I would consider it important.

I: Perfect. Now let's talk about challenges in communication. Do you perceive any challenges when it comes to communication with your leader?

P6: The biggest challenge for me personally is the lack of face-to-face interaction. That's something I miss a lot in the office because as I said earlier, that doesn't mean that everyone else is there too. Also, in regard to my leader, his presence definitely makes a difference for how easily and fast I can carry out my everyday tasks. And here too, not only connecting on a work base but also on a personal base and maintaining the feeling of working in a team and not as a "solo artist". That is definitely a challenge.

I: Yes.

P06: Although my leader is very proactive about staying connected virtually, it doesn't bridge the gap completely. And I realized that when communicating virtually, the

frequency decreases, which is most probably normal when you're physically not in the same place. But it does represent a challenge for me. What else (…) yes, what I also find quite challenging is the amount of communication channels we have. There's Teams, Phone Calls, E-Mails, What's App messages, personal meetings, and it's not very transparent which channel to use in which regard and through which channel my leader is accessible the best in this specific moment. There is no consistency. And a lack of consistency can sometimes lead to confusion or missed messages, which then requires additional follow-up and can slow down the overall progress.

I: Yes, absolutely.

P06: And that causes a lack of structure and common understanding, too. Where can I find which type of information? Was there an agreement over a different channel and did I simply miss out on it? My leader was only accessible through WhatsApp yesterday, is that the case today, too? All of this requires a lot of communication and transparency and issues like this simply don't occur when you're discussing things personally. In face-to-face meetings, everything is laid out clearly, and there's an opportunity for immediate feedback, which simplifies the whole process.

I: Yes, those are very good points, absolutely. As you mentioned it, do you have the possibility to give feedback on those issues? Communicate the problems?

P06: Yes definitely, my leader is very open when it comes to feedback, and we have the possibility to address feedback at any time.

I: Does he also proactively ask for it?

P06: This is something he does during our weekly meetings and also at the end of each quarter in a meeting that is specifically dedicated to feedback and optimization possibilities. It is called "Quarter Sum-Up" and everything that is addressed there is recorded in writing and part of the next Sum-Up is to discuss, whether the issues of the last quarter have been solved or not. If not, it is placed on the agenda for the next quarter again. This structured feedback loop is something I appreciate, as it ensures that issues are not only heard but also actively addressed and followed up on.

I: That sounds like a good approach. Regarding the channels you just mentioned, that would have been the next topic which is about technologies, and tools. Are those the main channels you use for communication purposes? And which channels do you rely on the most?

P06: We use all of them. But if you're asking for the main channel then it would probably be Teams. It's our go-to tool mostly for internal communication. We can quickly switch from chat to a call or even a video meeting, depending on the complexity of the issue in that moment.

I: Okay. Which channels would follow right after?

P06: That's difficult. For communication between us as a team, probably phone calls or text messages. And then Outlook. Emails are still important, especially for more formal communication or when we need to share documents.

I: Okay, good. Coming to the last part of the interview, which is about future recommendations, how do you think leadership communication could improve in the future? Are there any factors that you think will play a bigger role?

P06: I think what could be improved is the presence in the office. Being available and maintaining a surrounding where not only work-related matters are discussed but also where personal relationships are built, that's something I consider more and more important. That's why, at least from my perspective, being in the office and connecting not only on a business-level but also on a personal level will be something that stays and that can't be performed in the same way while sitting in front of a screen.

I: Interesting, yes.

P06: And also having a bit more structure and transparency in communication, so that nobody feels disconnected. Having a sort of guideline for which topics to address on which channel and when to use which channel to get immediate feedback would be a huge improvement, too.

I: Yes, I understand.

P06: And another point that just came to mind which I think I haven't addressed yet so far, that is trust. Trust is crucial for me, especially in a hybrid working model. And especially a hybrid setting which can be very dynamic, fast, and complex at times, I need to be able to trust that my leader values my work and supports me, even if we're not physically connected all the time.

I: Yes, absolutely. A very interesting point.

P06: This trust enables me to complete my tasks independently without feeling like I'm constantly being monitored but the same time, it's important that I also trust my leader to understand and respond to my needs and support me in my everyday challenges. So, it has to come from both directions, you know? I'm convinced that strong relationship of trust make communication much easier because you can talk openly and honestly about problems without the fear of negative consequences and that releases a lot of potential.

I: Definitely.

P06: And that adds up to my previous points, trust promotes cooperation and plays a key role in ensuring that everyone in the team feels comfortable and included and that in turn leads to a better work outcome. I'm sure that in the future, with virtual communication becoming even more foundational as it already is, the emphasis on building and maintaining trust will become even more important. Leaders will need to find new ways to build these trust relationships and that's how they can ensure that all team members, regardless of their work model, feel seen and supported.

I: Very good. Thank you so much for your insights, that was the ending of the interview. Is there anything that we haven't covered yet or that is still on your mind regarding this topic?

P6: No, actually (…) I think I've said everything. I'm very curious about the results.

I: Great, thank you again. I'll stop the recording now.

(Farewell and Closing Remarks)

D.7 Interview 7

Interview: 07
Role: Project Manager Visual Merchandising
Company: (Anonymous)
Industry: Luxury
Duration: 32:25
Date: 19.06.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: Very good. To begin with, could you tell me something about the industry you're working in, the position you're currently holding and about the work model you are working in?

P07: Sure. I work for a medium-sized company in the Luxury Industry, I work as a Project Manager for Visual Merchandising, and I work in a hybrid work model. Three days in the office and two days at home – most weeks.

I: Alright, how long have you been working hybrid?

P07: I transitioned into this model after the pandemic, before that I was working fully on-site. The shift to hybrid was initially a bit of an adjustment, but I quickly realized how much it simplifies things for me.

I: Okay. That sounds like you're satisfied in this work model and wouldn't want to go back to working on-site?

P07: No not at all, this shift has been quite beneficial for me. It gave me a lot more flexibility than I had before. Of course, being in the office every day had its advantages too, like easy access to colleagues and maybe clearer structures, but it also left little room for personal flexibility. Now I can complete my tasks efficiently and in my own pace and at the same time be more responsive to personal needs but not completely giving up on the personal aspect. Working from home allows me to plan my time better and still remain productive. It's really the best of both worlds so to speak.

I: Okay, perfect. Now let's continue with your perception of leadership communication in your current job, how important is the communication with your leader to you?

P07: Leadership communication is crucial in my role. We have a relatively flat structure, but my leader plays a key role in all of our running projects. We maintain a lot of projects at the same time and our leader coordinates and manages the workflows and makes sure that everything is running smoothly.

I: Yes, I understand.

P07: Also, that everyone has the information needed, which helps us stay aligned and productive. Without clear and frequent communication from our leaders, our work would lack direction, and that would definitely impact our effectiveness. We work in a very dynamic environment, our projects are often overlapping, and timelines can be really tight. The ability to communicate effectively is what keeps everything on track and prevents us from drifting apart.

I: Does your leader pursue a strategic approach when it comes to communication with the team?

P07: I would say so, yes. But it is a mix of planned and spontaneous communication. For instance, we have a weekly meeting where the entire team comes together, always on Wednesdays. This meeting is set and serves as our anchor point for the week. In addition, there's a lot of flexibility in how and when we communicate, which I think is key in a hybrid model. We also have an open-door policy, so I know I can reach out whenever necessary, whether that's in person or via Teams.

I: Okay, does that mean you all work in the same work model?

P07: Most of us, yes. There are a few people who prefer to work fully on-site, most of them live close to the office. But most of us have adopted the hybrid model. We ensure that we're all in the office on Wednesdays and on two additional days but those

additional days are a bit more flexible. This ensures that we maintain that in-person connection, which is important for the overall team dynamic.

I: Okay that's very interesting. Now, when you think about aspects that make the communication with your leader effective, what comes to your mind? Are there any aspects thar are specifically important?

P07: Absolutely, a very important aspect that immediately came to my mind is clarity. In a setting where we're not always physically in the same place, it's crucial that everyone knows what's expected of them, and that our leader creates a transparent environment. This also requires openness and a good understanding of team dynamics. In my opinion, our leader does a great job of ensuring that. And what's also important is accessibility, especially while working from home. If there's an important issue or if I need immediate support, then it's quite annoying if you have to wait for an hour or more and literally can't continue your tasks. In essence, it's about making sure communication is clear, timely, and that there's always an open line of communication when it's needed. Those are probably the most important points for me.

I: Okay, very good. Now I will read six terms to you, and I want you to tell me, how important you consider them regarding the communication with your leader in your work model, alright?

P07: Alright, sounds good.

I: Responsive behavior, frequency of communication, predictability and planning of communication, clarity of communication, the communication medium, which means when to use an email, when to have an in-person meeting, when just a phone call or a regular video conference and so on, and the last one, technological conditions.

P07: Okay, understood.

I: So, how important is the responsiveness of your leader for you in your work model?

P07: Responsiveness is very important to me. That even reflects what I just said. The hybrid model gives us a lot of flexibility, but that also means that timely communication is essential to keep things moving.

I: Very good. And how about the frequency of communication?

P07: Regular communication is key. It helps to maintain a connection within the team and ensures that we're all aligned. Even if it's just a quick daily check-in, it can make a big difference and reduce boundaries. And this regular contact also helps to reinforce our team culture, which in my opinion is particularly important in a hybrid model where

spontaneous office interactions aren't as frequent. It keeps everyone engaged and ensures that no one feels out of the loop.

I: Alright, what would you say about the predictability and planning of communication?

P07: While I generally appreciate structure and our weekly meeting, I think there's value in keeping some aspects of communication spontaneous. Of course, having some steps planned like project meetings or our monthly Merchandise Report meeting where we talk about the strategic steps and current status quo, for that it is necessary. These planned communications are crucial for setting clear expectations and making sure everyone knows what's coming. But apart from that, having exchange and discussing things as they come up is more sensible to me. So maybe not the most important point in my work model.

I: How would you rate the clarity of communication?

P07: Clarity is very important. The clearer and more direct the communication, the better and the quicker we can all perform our tasks.

I: Great. Medium of communication?

P07: Yes, the medium is definitely important. For example, complex discussions are best handled in person or over a call rather than through endless email chains. Quick updates or short questions can be handled over chat, but strategic discussions require more detailed conversations, for which the set meetings that I was just talking about are crucial. Those topics are better suited for video calls or face-to-face meetings. Choosing the right medium not only improves efficiency but also ensures that the message is conveyed in the most appropriate way and that in turn minimizes the risk of misinterpretation. So, only positive effects.

I: Yes, very good. And the last point, technological conditions?

P07: Of course, technology is crucial. Having reliable tools like Teams is essential for maintaining smooth communication and ensuring that we can all connect ourselves. Without the right technological support, even the best communication strategies can fall apart, especially when the majority of our interactions depend on these tools. It's like the foundation everything else is built on, so it's really important to keep it functioning properly.

I: Perfect. Now let's talk about challenges in communication. Are there any challenges in communication with your leader?

P07: Challenges (…). One challenge is knowing when your leader is available. That's an issue. Because the "available" and "busy" signs on Teams are not really reflecting

what is actually going on and if it's suitable to contact the leader in that moment. This can often lead to delays in getting answers or feedback.

I: Yes.

P07: And a second point maybe, not only knowing when someone is available but also knowing which tool to use. It's easy to get overwhelmed when you're juggling emails, Teams messages, phone calls, WhatsApp messages. It often ends in confusion or leads to situations where important information is missed or delayed because it was sent through the wrong medium. So, this can definitely be challenging too.

I: Yes. Would you say that those kinds of challenges are more likely to arise in a hybrid work environment?

P07: Not necessarily. I think by now, those type of challenges can occur everywhere as technological communication forms the basis in communication for every work model. Thinking of the ones who still come to the office every day – as most of us are not present every single day, that makes communication virtual for them, too. And that's why transparency is important, knowing about the leader's schedule, sharing information, speaking regularly, staying connected. That is what enables barrier-free communication.

I: I understand. Is there any feedback mechanism that give you the possibility to address those points?

P07: Yes, we have a strong feedback culture, I would say. I feel comfortable giving and receiving feedback. Our leader asks for it very regularly, so we have multiple opportunities to share our thoughts. During our weekly meeting and also in one-on-one sessions if necessary.

I: Very good. Now I would like to talk about the tools and practices you use for communication. Are there any main tools or tools that are used more intensely than others?

P07: For the daily chat and video calls, we mainly use Teams. Right after (…) probably Outlook and phone calls. But thinking about it, WhatsApp too. We use all of those channels depending on location and current topic. If we are on business trips and something important comes up, phone calls and WhatsApp messages are most likely answered immediately or at least within an hour. Outlook is more for documentation and official topics. And Teams is most important for video calls and for chat messages while we're all working on our computers.

I: Okay, I understand.

P07: But of course, this structure is not always followed very strictly when everyone is communicating from a different location. Of course, each tool has its strengths, and over time you start developing a sense of which ones work best for specific situations. But it is also important to align with the leader and the team on the evaluations of which tool is suited best. If everyone does it differently, nobody benefits from it. So, there's always room for improvement in how we structure our communication methods and to make sure that we reduce any potential for confusion.

I: Okay, very good. We're getting to the last part of the interview, which is about future developments. How do you think leadership communication could improve in the future and are there any factors that you think will play a more important role?

P07: Yes. So, in my opinion, leadership communication will need to focus even more on flexibility and inclusivity to find a suitable approach for every work environment. And even in a hybrid model, work schedules between employees differ and every work schedule comes with different needs. Leaders will probably need to be more flexible to make sure that everyone feels included and happy. This flexibility will be key in adapting to the specific needs of everyone, regardless of their work model. I also think there will be more emphasis on using technology effectively and finding the right balance between virtuality and presence. And of course, this requires clear and open communication and understanding.

I: Yes.

P07: And what I also find extremely important, I'm not sure if I mentioned it before, is consistency.

I: Yes, interesting.

P07: Maintaining consistency will become a critical topic for leaders, I'm very convinced of that. The work environment is dynamic enough these days, communication doesn't have to be as well. We can only build a functioning communicative environment and develop structures if a certain consistency is demonstrated by the leader.

I: Absolutely.

P07: It is likely that teams will become more distributed, although I'm convinced days in presence will always be needed. But that means that staying connected and aligned could get even more complicated than it already is. That's why consistent communication is so important – it keeps everyone on the same page, no matter where they are.

I: Yes.

P07: Communicating regularly, communicating clearly, and having the right technological foundations are all elementary factors, I totally agree on that. But if this is not performed consistently and employees do not know what to expect, the lack of consistency is transferred to the quality of their own communication and eventually their work.

I: Exactly.

P07: And this ultimately harms the entire team and the company. Consistency will help prevent misunderstandings, keep everyone aligned with the goals, and foster a sense of belonging and togetherness within the team. And even if personal meetings are not given, consistent communication can act as a glue that holds the team together and also connects the leader to the team.

I: That was a perfect conclusion. Thank you very much for that. That was the last question of this survey.

P07: Awesome, thank you for considering me. That was a good exchange, I had fun. I really appreciate the opportunity to reflect on these aspects.

I: It was fun for me too, thank you very much for your time. Is there anything else topic related that we haven't covered or anything you'd like to add?

P07: No, I am very happy with my statements. I think we've touched on all the key points that matter to me.

I: Perfect, I'll stop the recording then.

(Farewell and Closing Remarks)

E. Interview Transcripts Leader

E.1 Interview 8

Interview: 08
Role: Leader Research Division
Company: BASF
Industry: Chemicals
Duration: 33:23
Date: 12.06.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: To start, it would be great if you could tell me which organization you work for, what position you hold, and in what work model you are employed.

P8: Yes, of course. So, my background is in Business Administration. I studied Business Administration in Cologne and Mannheim, and also in China. I joined BASF in 2015 through a trainee program. I went through various stages there, starting with Human Resources, then I was a Business Partner at CP, working in Global Compensation. After that, I spent six months in Mergers & Acquisitions and three months in Singapore working on the Sales Incentive Plan. Then I worked for two years in Compensation Germany. I then returned to Mergers & Acquisitions two years ago and took over the Business Partner team for Bioscience Research. As part of a restructuring, during which all research areas were consolidated, I then took over the Agile Business Partner team for the entire research division.

I: Wow, that's definitely very interesting. Yes. Are you mainly working remotely, on-site, or in a hybrid model?

P8: I work in a hybrid model. Typically, we have a team day each week, which is on Tuesday. Everyone is present on that day. We have two hubs, one in the north and one in the south. We also try to ensure that on some days, everyone is in the north and on other days, everyone is in the south. In the end, we are partly working from home and partly on-site.

I: Okay. And how many employees do you have under you?

P8: There should be a total of 20. So, 14 in Ludwigshafen (the company location), then two to three in America. That number varies a bit. Two in China and one in India.

I: Wow, okay. So, a distributed team. How do they work? Of course, setting aside those who are abroad, but for those in Germany, do they also work in a hybrid model? Or are there any exceptions?

P8: Yes, they also work in a hybrid model.

I: Okay. Then we are already moving on to the second part. Now we will discuss leadership communication. How would you describe the importance of leadership communication for you and your team? How important is it to have strong leadership communication?

P8: Yes, it is absolutely essential for me because we don't see each other very often. Therefore, I think it's also important to use newer communication tools, such as MS Teams, and to be in daily contact with the employees. I believe it has actually become even more important compared to before because previously we would see each other and also pick up on passive communication when we were sitting across from each other. Of course, all of that is lost in a hybrid model. So, I would say it's crucial to stay in much closer contact.

I: Would you say that in a hybrid environment like yours, there are key factors that determine the effectiveness of communication with your team?

P8: Yes, I think accessibility is definitely very important. For example, having a Teams channel where you can quickly ask a question. This somewhat mirrors the idea of "stopping by the office briefly and asking something." I think that's definitely important. Otherwise, the differences aren't that significant, I would say. And transparency is crucial as well, such as being able to see colleagues' calendars, so my colleague can see my calendar and know whether I am currently in a meeting or just unavailable. I think that's important too.

I: Those are good points. Would you say that the time spent in the office versus remote work affects leadership communication? Are there differences where you would say that communication in the office is different from in a hybrid model, or specific focuses you apply in the office compared to a hybrid work environment?

P8: Yes, in the office, you observe body language and many other cues that are lost in a virtual setup. This allows you to quickly assess how employees are feeling and address their needs more effectively. That's the main difference when working on-site. On the other hand, the virtual setup can be more agile; for instance, you can quickly bring someone into a discussion if you have a question and they are not physically present. You can just connect them briefly, which is an advantage of the virtual setup.

I: Yes, that's interesting, especially since it's often said that managing communication in a hybrid work environment is more challenging.

P8: Personal contact is crucial initially for getting to know each other, which strengthens trust. Otherwise, I believe the hybrid model can be more efficient because it allows for quicker access to team members. Of course, it's important to avoid overwhelming employees, as there's a higher expectation for prompt feedback. From my experience, it also depends on the individual employee. For those who are already highly motivated and enjoy working, remote work can act as a catalyst, sometimes leading to even more work being done from home. Conversely, if someone is less active physically, it can reinforce their tendency to be less engaged, resulting in lower engagement in a home office setting.

I: Yes. If an employee were to come to you and say, "I want to work remotely all the time," would that be an option for you? Or do you think the hybrid model, with regular weekly meetings, is important?

P8: For me, this is very individual. If I have an employee whom I have met here and know is good, then it would be no problem at all for me. There are definitely some names I could mention where I wouldn't have any issues with that. On the other hand, there are others where it would be more difficult for me because I feel that their motivation might decrease if they are working alone at home.

I: Yes.

P8: But I find it hard to generalize. I believe there are people for whom remote work works very well, and there are others for whom it's beneficial to be on-site occasionally.

I: So, in principle, it becomes a new task for the leader or a new skill that needs to be developed?

P8: Yes, definitely. It is mandatory for a leader being able to assess individual aspects and engage with employees in a way that allows for an accurate evaluation and establishes a trust-based relationship.

I: Okay, that's interesting. Would you say that you focus on different aspects in remote versus office environments? For example, because you have the option to come together in the office, do some challenges in virtual teamwork become less of an issue, or do they complement each other, or are there perhaps not very significant differences because the in-office communication is effectively captured in the virtual setting?

P8: Yes, I would say the differences are relatively minor. One issue might be when several people are on a call, there's always this time lag with Teams, which sometimes makes communication more difficult. For example, if two people want to speak at the same time and there's a delay, it results in them talking over each other. This can be a bit more challenging in a larger team setup. But otherwise, I would say the differences are really marginal.

I: Okay, I understand. Do you follow a strategic approach in this regard, or did you just experiment as your team grew? Do you have a strategy?

P8: Not really, I would say. Ultimately, we constantly adapt and see what works and what doesn't. At the beginning, we noticed that it was a bit unstructured working from home. We needed some sort of protocol to keep track of what we discussed, because we'd come up with a good idea, move on to the next topic, and not follow through with the idea. We gradually developed this process and eventually set a deadline because we realized we needed to implement things by a certain time. It's really a continuous process where we keep assessing what works and what doesn't. Sometimes we say, "That worked before, but it doesn't work as well now." (…) Yes (…) but we haven't created a specific team agenda outlining "this is how we want to work." Instead, we decided to try things out and adjust accordingly. Now we have some rules to follow, but these have emerged more from the process itself. For example, if you have a task that can easily be resolved via email, there's no need to bring it up in a team meeting, as that would just slow things down.

I: That's a very interesting point. Is feedback regularly collected from your side?

P8: We definitely do that. We have a monthly meeting where we all come together in person, regardless of whether people are in the north or the south. We discuss such topics during these meetings. We do a check-up and ask, "Is there anything we should adjust?" And we have always received really good ideas from these sessions.

I: Great. Would you also say that feedback opportunities – while they have always been relevant, of course – have become even more important with virtual work models?

P8: I would say minimally. I think the tools have simply improved. With Forms, you can quickly post a short survey and get feedback faster. Although I must say, in person it's also relatively simple – just ask people and they give a direct response. But it is a bit more flexible. You get feedback quickly and in writing, which is definitely an advantage.

I: Yes, okay, great. Now, regarding specific challenges in communication: What challenges do you face for effective leadership communication in a hybrid work model? How would you assess that?

P8: I think the most important thing is really maintaining regular contact, reaching out to each employee at least every other day and checking in on how they are doing. Because, of course, it can happen that some people, due to isolation, might be alone, without a partner or a large family. Over time, they might feel isolated and wish to be on-site more often. So, I believe that's very important. Also, managing expectations about when and how one is available is crucial. This has become more important

because otherwise, you don’t know when someone is in a meeting or how to reach them. With a calendar, I can see, for example, that they are unavailable for the next two hours. That’s definitely important. Regular communication is key – those are the main points, I think.

I: Would you say that leading employees in a virtual work environment presents greater challenges than on-site? Has it been that way for you, or would you say it has perhaps made things easier?

P8: I think it’s just different. When you always see each other physically, there might be different kinds of conflicts compared to when you see each other virtually in a team. There are little things, like having a shared desk principle and constantly swapping desks. Since not everyone has their own desk anymore, one person might not be very happy if the previous person didn’t lower the desk or left something there overnight. Of course, this doesn’t happen virtually. However, there are other issues in a virtual setting, such as when someone is poorly reachable. So, I believe it’s just different, but neither better nor worse—just really different.

I: Yes, okay. The next focus we discussed was whether communication strategies are continuously adjusted. As you mentioned, it is an ongoing process. Employees are asked for feedback, and then adjustments are made where necessary, correct?

P8: Yes, it really depends on the individual employees. When someone leaves the team and a new employee joins, they might have different needs than the previous employee. It’s important to ensure that everyone feels comfortable in the team. Therefore, we need to continuously adjust our strategy in this process from that perspective.

I: Perhaps a follow-up question on that. Is the 2-day/3-day model the one you use most frequently in your team, or is it one day in the office and the rest of the time at home?

P8: We have one mandatory day in the office, but I would say that employees are generally on-site 2 to 3 days a week. There might be weeks where we spend the entire week in the office, but it can also be that we are on-site for just one day. It varies from week to week, I would say.

I: Okay, so it's flexible and not a strict model where you dictate the exact schedule to the employees.

P8: Only for that one office day. It’s really important to me that everyone sees each other at least one day a week, but otherwise, it’s flexible.

I: Okay, very good.

P8: There is often a need for discussion with my leader, who has a slightly different view. But it's important to me, and I stand by it.

I: That's interesting. So, it's also the case that among leaders, regardless of their level, different approaches are taken, and each follows their own strategy?

P8: Definitely. I think it also depends on personality. Some prefer to have everyone on-site, while others place no value on physical presence at all. From my experience, it really varies from leader to leader. It's also somewhat topic-dependent, depending on where we work. For instance, there are areas where physical presence is necessary, especially for research experiments that can only be conducted with the equipment on-site. On the other hand, there are office tasks like controlling where it's not a problem if people work from home.

I: Yes. But would you say that there are still many leaders who, even if it were possible to work remotely from home, fundamentally do not want to?

P8: Yes, not in my immediate environment, where everyone also works from home occasionally. But I do know leaders who prefer a 100% on-site presence because they believe it provides better access to their employees and improves communication. It's very individual, but it definitely exists.

I: Okay, yes, I think I'll return to that point when discussing future outlooks. Before that, regarding tools and practices used for communication, which technologies have proven to be particularly effective for your team? What is your main tool?

P8: Yes, our main communication channel is definitely Teams. We use it for nearly everything because you can quickly post a question and tap into the collective knowledge of the team, and also hold meetings through it. We also use Notes extensively for knowledge management within the team. Additionally, we use Teams plugins like Forms for quick surveys, to check availability, or to book appointments. Teams is really our primary tool, I would say. Then there's Outlook, of course, for classic emails, and we use very few other tools.

I: Would you say that information exchange or efficient information exchange has become even more important in a hybrid work environment, especially to share information efficiently and make it visible to everyone?

P8: I do think it's definitely different now because some information gets lost due to the absence of incidental contacts. When people used to run into each other, they would have a conversation, and suddenly an idea would come up. You have to find other ways to capture that now. Notes can't fully replace that, but they do have the advantage of enabling a very thorough knowledge management process, which might even be easier compared to before, since much implicit knowledge has been documented. So, I would

say it's different, but not necessarily better or worse – it has both advantages and disadvantages.

I: And regarding the tools you use, such as Teams, Notes, or Outlook, are you satisfied with the technology itself—does it work well?

P8: Yes, even the older employees who are nearing retirement and initially had some reservations are managing quite well with it. Yes.

I: Okay. Is the suitability of these communication tools regularly assessed, or are new technologies or programs considered, or is it more a case of "if it isn't broken, don't fix it"?

P8: No, definitely not. We started with WebEx and Java, which was a kind of chat program, and then switched to Teams during COVID. Now we have implemented a ChatGPT version called BASF-Chat, so new tools are continually being added and old ones are sometimes phased out. This is constantly evaluated, but it's the IT colleagues who handle it for us and roll it out globally.

I: Okay. Are there additional measures taken using these technologies to enhance and promote leadership communication?

P8: So, we hold a team meeting twice a week to follow up on various topics. We document everything to maintain structure. I definitely use that. We don't really have virtual coffee chats; we prefer to do those in person because I find it more enjoyable when people can actually see each other and engage in more communication. Those are, I would say, the main tools we use.

I: Okay, understood. In the final section, we'll discuss future developments. Where do you think leadership communication is headed in terms of hybrid, remote, and on-site work? Do you believe the hybrid model will remain the most common working model, or do you think it will shift more towards remote work?

P8: I definitely think that hybrid is the future. Perhaps with an even greater emphasis on home office. Although the trend seems to be moving back towards the office, I believe this is more due to top management's expectations. From my operational perspective, I can't confirm that it's absolutely necessary. I think a certain level of presence will always be needed because it greatly facilitates collaboration. However, overall, there are many benefits because employees can better manage their stress. Tasks requiring deep focus can be handled well from home, while tasks needing creativity might benefit from being in the office. I think the mix offers the most advantages.

I: What would you say are the specific aspects of leadership communication that will play a larger role or need to be further developed? What skills are necessary now that weren't needed to the same extent before?

P8: Well, I'm not sure if this is more related to the hybrid model or the new generation, but I believe that inclusive leadership has become much more important. By this, I mean involving employees more in decision-making processes and making them feel part of the team. It used to be more top-down. However, it could also be related to the hybrid work environment, as it might make people feel more isolated and in need of a greater sense of belonging to the team.

I: Yes. And do you think that the top management approach with a high degree of presence will prevail, especially with younger people starting jobs who might not be willing to take on roles where virtual work is fundamentally not possible? Do you think this approach will still be effective in the future?

P8: Personally, I find it rather outdated. However, I also think it's a matter of supply and demand. If the job market were different, employers might be able to impose other requirements or guidelines. From what I observe, policies on paper often don't fully match what is practiced because management doesn't enforce them as strongly. Therefore, I believe that, at least in the medium term, a complete shift back to office-based work will not occur, but time will tell.

I: Okay, that was a perfect conclusion. That was the last question. Thank you very much. Is there anything else you'd like to add or anything we haven't discussed yet?

P8: No, there's nothing else.

I: Alright, then I'll end the recording.

(Farewell and Closing Remarks)

E.2 Interview 9

Interview: 09
Role: Head of Human Resources
Company: BASF
Industrie: Chemicals
Duration: 33:07
Date: 14.06.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: Okay, great. Let's start with some background information about you and the organization. In which organization are you employed? What industry does the organization operate in? And what is your working model?

P9: Okay, so I work in the chemical industry. I am the Head of Human Resources for a specific area within BASF and I have global responsibility. I work in Ludwigshafen (company location), but also with regions in Asia and North America. I also work with local colleagues on-site who provide services for us but are not directly under my supervision. So, I have both direct and indirect reports. I manage two levels: a team leader level beneath me and two employee levels. My management is global, so my employees, like our overall workforce, are distributed globally. I have employees in Shanghai, Texas, and Ludwigshafen.

I: Okay. Since I am writing my thesis about the German market, let’s focus on the Ludwigshafen site. How many employees are based there?

P9: Sure. There are approximately 3,000 of us there. I have two teams.

I: Okay, perfect.

P9: Then let's move on to leadership communication. How would you describe the importance of leadership communication in general? What role does it play in your daily work with your team?

P9: Well, I want my employees to be empowered to work autonomously. They need to be, because we have different regions, and the work is often very local. This means that within their areas of responsibility, they need to make decisions autonomously and function independently in their daily tasks. It's simply not feasible for me to be constantly available for everyone, especially with time zone differences. Nonetheless, communication is crucial for me. I have regular check-ins with everyone, focusing on two main aspects. First, the strategic direction – big decisions, how we want to act, what our current goals are, which I also formalize. This includes cultural aspects and key topics like our staffing levels or promoting diversity and inclusion. These are parts of our strategy, derived from the company strategy, that I need to communicate regularly with my teams to ensure we are all working in the same direction. On an operational level, as mentioned, there's relative autonomy. But there's a second major point where I communicate a lot. Whenever significant events occur, such as the pandemic, and currently the energy crisis, which has heavily impacted us and led

to restructuring and staff reductions in Ludwigshafen, I need to be present for the team. I have to take responsibility and oversee how we handle these issues, including the support needed. That's when I communicate a lot and am also present on-site.

I: Okay. That leads into my next question – whether a strategic approach is being followed. This seems to be definitely the case, especially depending on current events, such as the energy crisis, right?

P9: Exactly, exactly. And to add another point, the corporate headquarters, as part of the global organization, is always somewhat of a special entity or a unique site. It's more in the spotlight and more political. This means there's usually more communication happening there.

I: Yes, definitely. Do your employees work in different models, or are they all either hybrid or remote, or do some of them work full-time in the office?

P9: Both. I leave it up to the employees. It also depends on the nature of their work. Many of our employees work in production and technical roles, so they need to be on-site, operating machinery and equipment. For those roles, our approach is different, although we are open to hybrid work arrangements there as well. Typically, we expect them to be on-site for at least three days a week, but they can work from home up to two days. In individual cases, it can be adjusted if someone has a specific issue or needs to work from home for a week. We also have employees who come to the office full-time because they might not have a suitable home office setup or because they prefer to be on-site due to personal reasons, such as childcare. So, it's quite dependent on the role and the manager. Generally, we have a rule in place for our team: our job allows for remote work. Of course, we need to be present for meetings, talent events, and to be visible to our teams. But, overall, the hybrid model works well, with three days on-site and two days at home. Interestingly, cultural factors also play a significant role. Employees in Asia tend to prefer being in the office more, as there is a stronger emphasis on hierarchy and showing presence. In Europe and North America, employees are more pragmatic, and the choice between remote and on-site work often depends on the local circumstances. I also consider personal situations, such as if someone is feeling unwell or has a childcare issue, which justifies allowing hybrid work or working from home on certain days.

I: So, would you say that you don’t have a preferred work model per se, but that it should be tailored individually to the needs and situation of each person? Especially if there are mandatory meetings that require physical presence?

P9: Actually, my preferred model is the hybrid one—three or four days on-site and one or two days working from home—because it combines the best of both worlds. Working from home is significantly more efficient, as I’ve observed myself. You don’t lose time commuting, etc. On-site, the goal is to connect and spend some time having coffee with colleagues. Combining both aspects is the best model for our profession. The arrangement is then made based on what is feasible within the team. It is, of course, a prerequisite that not all team members are working from home every day; it’s not necessary for the entire team to be on-site all the time, but there needs to be a good balance within the team.

I: Yes. Are there key factors in leadership communication that you find particularly important for managing communication in different work settings? Factors that need to be in place for a successful blend of virtual and in-person communication.

P9: Yes, I believe that a lot of communication, commitment, and consistency are important. I not only have regular check-ins with the teams, but I also share a lot of information and emails and provide commentary. I also regularly invite the entire team to team meetings – maintaining team spirit and motivation is important. Ensuring that everyone feels integrated is crucial. This is, of course, not always easy because the teams are sometimes smaller, and when you're working in pairs, it's more challenging to feel a sense of belonging. With larger teams, it's easier. I have two teams, and they already have their own team structure and dynamics. But especially at locations with smaller teams, it's important to find ways to include them and make them feel part of the BASF world. Therefore, I think it's essential to stay close, build trust, and address sensitive topics while keeping them informed. Larger meetings are also important to bring the whole team together, usually virtually. The big challenge is indeed the time zone. I never bring the entire team together because North America, Asia, and Europe cannot coordinate their schedules effectively. It's possible, but it means one group has a call at 10 PM and the other at 5 AM. This works in emergencies, but it's not feasible for regular meetings.

I: Okay. Would you say that you place different emphasis on the virtual part versus the office part? Does this make a significant difference for you, or would you say you notice a different behavior in yourself?

P9: A different behavior in myself (…). Yes, when I am virtual and we are all dialed in, I might be a bit more focused on slides and content-related topics. When we are on-site, especially since I'm not there every day, the focus is naturally on connection. We sit down as a team and also discuss things privately. This tends to happen more than in a meeting that everyone has on their agenda, where we are dealing with a specific topic and might not see each other beforehand or in pairs in a corner. In those situations, we are more likely to stick to the topic, whereas on-site, we naturally also engage in casual conversations and try to build connections. The challenge then is ensuring that everyone is actually on-site. As I mentioned, we have hybrid models, so if eight people are present but two are working from home, we still have a hybrid WebEx setup. The difficulty here is that those working from home miss out on the dynamics, the looks, and possibly even side comments. That's the challenge, I would say.

I: Yes, I understand. Are there any specific measures you take to keep employees motivated?

P9: Yes, I try to keep the team together, and we also organize workshops from time to time. Last year, we focused on resilience, and we all met in Ludwigshafen for a session with a trainer. Doing something special together that helps us both in our work and as a team is important. We also conduct regular surveys. Recently, we had a survey called Employee Voices. This involves an employee feedback survey. I receive the team's anonymous feedback, and we then discuss the results. I try to introduce some additional elements and, otherwise, ensure that the team is well-structured with competent personnel to facilitate good collaboration. I also aim to work closely with the team personally. I make an effort to be

present, even if only virtually, to provide support and empathy. While video meetings are somewhat effective, they are, of course, not the same as being on-site.

I: Yes, which, of course, is very different in a large corporation compared to smaller and mid-sized companies. It's quite interesting.

P9: Yes, and for personal interaction, we also use tools like MS Teams chats. Sending a smiley, sharing a picture, and exchanging informal information, both professional and personal, enhances communication from both sides.

I: I'll come back to Teams later. But first, let's talk about potential challenges in communication that might arise. What do you see as the biggest challenges for maintaining effective communication with your team?

P9: For effective communication, one challenge is having clear lines of leadership and ensuring that there is an impact on employees. It must be clear who the superior is. This isn't trivial in a global organization, because while I am the functional manager for my employees and, for some, also the disciplinary manager, in the German system, employees in Ludwigshafen are ultimately disciplined by someone at the site – so they report to the site's departmental head. Clear structures and lines of leadership are essential. Additionally, having the right technology to facilitate good collaboration is crucial. This means having the necessary tools, such as MS Teams, chat functions, and SharePoint. These are definitely success factors. Occasionally, having a personal touchpoint is important. Although financially challenging in recent years, sometimes you need to board a plane to see your colleagues in person. Last week, for instance, we were in South Korea, where I met with my staff. This is important. Furthermore, being able to communicate in writing and formally is also necessary. Preparing information for virtual use, whether in slides or files, enhances efficiency.

I: Yes, very important points. Would you say that, compared to before COVID, when more in-person work was done, virtual communication poses more challenges than on-site work, and thus remote and hybrid work presents more challenges than working in the office? Or do you think that current technology and the work-from-home setup have mitigated these issues, so that communication still functions well in your organization?

P9: I would say that technically, we've managed to address the challenges. We have good tools and capabilities, and you can focus on slides just as effectively virtually as you can on-site. Perhaps hybrid meetings are an exception; they are more challenging for those who are not present. However, with a WebEx conference where everyone is dialed in, information can be shared and communicated effectively. The personal aspect is indeed more challenging in a hybrid model. It's hard to replicate reactions, gestures, and the personal touch that comes from informal conversations or building connections in a coffee corner. This doesn't work the same way virtually as it does on-site. That's obvious.

I: And back to the feedback options you mentioned earlier. Are you adjusting your communication strategy based on the results of a survey?

P9: Yes, the feedback often addresses the company as an employer, but it also brings out personal aspects related to collaboration. This means I would definitely derive certain rules for my team from it. Last year, we had a team workshop where we discussed how we could improve our collaboration. This process uncovered many issues. What kind of meetings do we need? Can we streamline anything to save time? Is there something we could do differently? We concluded that operational topics could be handled on-site, and we could meet in person to bring the teams together. For larger topics, we would continue to meet virtually so that everyone can dial in. So yes, I absolutely take the team's feedback into account and adjust how we communicate.

I: Okay, great. Regarding technologies and tools that you use for communication purposes, which tool do you rely on the most?

P9: Outlook for email and MS Teams for meetings and chat functions, where we can also quickly exchange information and files. This is followed by SharePoint, and of course, in-person meetings.

I: Okay, understood. Are there additional measures, aside from meetings, that are taken to maintain team cohesion?

P9: At the beginning of the pandemic, we had virtual coffee chats. The hype around those has diminished a bit now that it's possible to meet in person if desired. They were useful for bridging the gap created by not being able to meet face-to-face, especially for those who felt very isolated. I believe that's no longer necessary. We now have a half-hour call twice a week where we discuss important matters, but also sometimes personal topics or just have a coffee together. It's a sort of hybrid between a work meeting and casual coffee time. Otherwise, we usually do that in person, through workshops or by going out for dinner together. At the beginning of this year, for example, we had a joint breakfast. But these activities are conducted on-site.

I: Yes, those are intriguing insights. For the final part, I'm interested in your views on future developments. How do you see the future of leadership communication in these different work models? Do you think hybrid working, which is the most commonly used work model in Germany, will continue to dominate? Or do you foresee a shift towards more in-person or remote work in the future? And what will this mean for leadership communication?

P9: Yes, I believe there are still many professions where this isn't an issue at all. We're talking about a smaller segment where it is even possible. Especially in large industries like manufacturing or automotive, it applies only to a small part of the workforce, and I think hybrid working has become a fixed component in those areas. I also believe it has somewhat stabilized. The minority of people would say they want to work only on-site or only from home. I think that more autonomous work arrangements or hybrid models, even if regulated by specific percentages, have become almost a prerequisite for employees today. We see this especially with young applicants for jobs where it's feasible. It's a given requirement. Of course, everything is becoming more global, and people want to live and work elsewhere. So, I don't think this model is going away. Whether it will expand further, I'm not sure. Both in-person and remote work have their advantages, and I don't think anyone wants to completely forgo either. But as an employer, you definitely need to adapt; otherwise, you'll

be left out of the job market. There's still room to become more professional. There are certainly tools that could make things smoother in the future. Additionally, what's not a complete blind spot but still underdeveloped is how professionals, both leaders and employees, present themselves in virtual environments. We can all share slides and have discussions, but how to sit professionally in front of the camera, maintain eye contact, be well-lit, and engage people is still lacking. Many still switch off or multitask during conferences. This is a major issue, with attention spans decreasing, and people often check emails and aren't fully focused. There is definitely room for improvement. I notice that with some consulting firms, if you take a course with a professional speaker, you can see the difference. Companies are still lagging in this area. It's not a top priority during a crisis, but I believe it will develop further. It's definitely a future topic for professions where it's possible, and AI will likely advance it as well. Perhaps it will become more relevant for other professions in the future, and new job families may emerge for which it's currently not possible.

I: Yes, definitely. Those are fascinating viewpoints. Do you see yourself as a leader, or generally leaders in your industry, feeling a bit pressured to initiate and actively shape these developments?

P9: I don't see myself as necessarily having to be a trailblazer for the industry or for our team in my role as a leader. However, in my position as a professional or leader, I do need to raise awareness among management about the importance of these issues and advocate for acceptance. It's partly a generational issue, as a significant portion of the senior management, who may come from an older generation, still believes that working on-site is more productive, whereas working from home is not. I think it's more about creating a concept for corporate culture that can be more strongly supported.

I: Yes, definitely. The generational aspect is also that often older generation leaders are less willing to support remote or hybrid work models and prefer that people work on-site. Do you think this is unsustainable in the long term, considering that things will likely change significantly over the next 10 to 15 years? Or is it no longer a viable approach?

P9: Looking at the job market, I don't think we can afford to disregard this trend, as we would simply not attract applicants. We also need to consider women in the workforce, and often, childcare issues can only be addressed through remote work. It also depends on where someone is in their life cycle; for instance, those with young children might need remote work options. As a leader, you have to provide that flexibility. It's unavoidable.

I: Very well said. That was the last question from my side. Is there anything else that hasn't been addressed, something you think is important to mention on this topic?

P9: No, actually not. One interesting aspect of communication overall is related to reaching a large area. For instance, if you want to reach 6,000 people globally, doing it in person is no longer feasible, and it wasn't even possible before COVID. You have to resort to virtual town halls. This is still an area where we're in the early stages. There aren't yet well-established formats. You have to deal with time zones, technology issues, and the lack of interaction in mass calls. Asking a question in such a setting can be daunting and looking foolish is a real concern. Virtually, this is a significant challenge. Leading a large

organization globally and communicating effectively is really difficult. It requires professional communication that leverages media like LinkedIn and other modern channels. It's a complex task to do it well. For smaller leaders, this may not be as relevant because the team remains close-knit, but at multiple hierarchical levels, it becomes more challenging. The rapid pace of change adds another layer of complexity. Today, TikTok is the trend, and tomorrow it might be something entirely different. Technology evolves quickly, and one must determine what is professionally appropriate for a company. At the same time, broad communication is needed to reach younger audiences. Balancing this with confidentiality, legal issues, and investor relations is another critical aspect. This topic is particularly intriguing, especially in terms of communication and leadership at different levels. I'm not sure if your interviews cover leaders managing around 5,000 people, but that presents its own set of challenges.

I: That's very interesting. I haven't had a participant with such a broad range of experience yet. It is indeed incredibly challenging, especially with platforms like TikTok. Deciding how quickly to adopt new trends, and ensuring it remains professional, is a complex issue.

P9: Yes, exactly. Professionalism is a key point. How do you maintain professionalism while possibly allowing some humor in internal communication? There's also the cultural aspect to consider. For instance, with our employee survey, we used posters to boost participation. We even put posters in the restrooms with a double entendre, saying, "Let it out." The Americans found it hilarious, but in Germany, reactions were mixed—some found it great, while others found it distasteful or offensive. It's really challenging.

I: That's quite intriguing. You can't please everyone, of course. Finding the right balance is tough, especially at BASF, which includes a significant number of older employees. Other industries, especially younger or startup cultures, might approach this differently.

P9: That's definitely true. BASF is an old and conservative company. The key was to capture attention, and we achieved that. Sometimes, creating a buzz is the main goal. Actual content is a different matter. We have a new CEO now, so it will be interesting to see how he rolls out and communicates his strategy. That's something we're looking forward to.

I: Yes, definitely.

P9: The point about capturing attention is well made. Often, when it comes to surveys, you hang up posters that are informative but not very impactful, as people tend to overlook them. So, it was definitely an interesting action.

I: Those were many great insights. Thank you very much for the conversation and for the time you took. It really helps me a lot.

P9: No, I think we've probably covered most of what comes to mind for me.

I: Then I'll stop the recording now.

(Farewell and Closing Remarks)

E.3 Interview 10

Interview: 10
Role: CEO
Company: Kaimann GmbH
Industry: Chemical
Duration: 36:26
Date: 17.06.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: Let's start with some background information about yourself and the organization.

P10: Yes, briefly about my background. I am an engineer and have worked in various roles. A key point was that I worked at McKinsey relatively early in my career, which exposed me to areas beyond the technical side. Over the past 20 plus years, I've held general manager or CEO roles in various B2B industrial companies, all of which were internationally active. Most recently, and this will likely be the main focus of our discussion, I was CEO of Kaiman for the last five years. Kaiman is a chemical and technical industry company that produces insulation materials from synthetic rubber. It was formerly a medium-sized company that was acquired by Saint-Gobain. I spent the last 20 years at Saint-Gobain, a large French conglomerate. Saint-Gobain has numerous subsidiaries, and in the insulation sector, Kaiman was a new acquisition at the end of 2018, which we integrated into the group. Communication played a significant role in this process, particularly in terms of cultural change and transitioning from a patriarchal management style to a more collaborative approach, where we encouraged employees to contribute and take responsibility. That's the background.

I: That's very interesting, thank you for the overview. What work model do you use?

P10: Over the last five years, I have primarily worked on-site four days a week on average, with one day working from home. You would probably categorize that as hybrid, right?

I: Yes, I would classify that as hybrid. How many employees do you manage?

P10: 300.

I: And what is the work setup your employees are working in?

P10: Different. About 200 of them work in production and logistics, and they are naturally on-site. Well, the logistics area also includes some planning, so those employees work in a hybrid model occasionally, but most of them are on-site. The other employees work in a hybrid setup with varying focuses from department to department. But we'll probably get into that later.

I: Yes, if there's anything you'd like to add, feel free to do so. Otherwise, we can revisit this topic at the end. All information is relevant.

P10: Okay, I can elaborate a bit. During the pandemic, we didn't have to close, but we were so severely affected that departments were significantly reduced, and we were encouraged to work remotely as much as possible. We found that this was the only way we could maintain our operations and help limit the spread of the disease, or at least contribute to it. On the other hand, we also noticed that for functions that didn't necessarily need to be on-site, such as IT, HR, or sales, the communication among team members, as well as between the respective leaders and their team members, suffered when employees were working from home extensively.

I: Yes, I understand.

P10: And then, once the situation no longer required it, we decided we needed to address this. We set a maximum of two days per week for employees to work from home and required them to work on-site for three days. We also advised departments to choose one day when everyone should be present to facilitate communication among them. In some departments, this was no issue. In others, particularly in the IT department, it was more challenging. They had grown accustomed to working from home, found it comfortable, and felt they didn't really need to be on-site since their work was computer-based. They even felt demotivated about returning to the office. However, we insisted on having at least three days on-site per week for everyone to ensure team cohesion.

I: That's an interesting approach. How would you describe the role of leadership communication in this whole structure within your company? Does it play a significant role in how work is carried out? Is it given a lot of importance?

P10: Yes, it plays a significant role. Ultimately, we want to involve our employees, as they create the value, not just a few individual leaders. To get employees to work towards the same goal, communication is key. We've adjusted our communication on various levels. As I mentioned earlier, we went through a cultural shift in the company, and we strengthened our communication. For instance, we started a monthly employee newsletter to keep everyone informed about the company's status, challenges, progress, and what we are working on. We also trained our leaders. We implemented a training program for them that wasn't just a one-time leadership course but included modules over several months. It stretched over about a year and a half, with recurring workshops lasting a day and a half each. This training focused on overall communication skills, not just COVID-related or work-specific communication. It included how to communicate effectively with employees, give feedback, set goals, handle criticism, manage difficult employees, resolve conflicts, and seek help if needed. While this wasn't our primary business focus, it's crucial for getting and keeping employees on board.

I: Definitely. And essentially, this almost answers the next question as well: Is there a strategic approach to leadership communication? The focus on the points you just mentioned was likely developed as a strategic approach beforehand.

P10: Exactly. I'm not sure if you are familiar with the term VMVO, which stands for Values, Mission, Vision, and Objectives. We developed this collaboratively, not just with the managing director or the leadership team, but also involving other leaders. We then communicated it through various means – not just verbally, but also through posters and

explanations, and so on. This outlines our strategy, our strategic goals, as well as our current position, where we want to go, why we want to go there, and what it specifically means for each individual. It clarifies what they can contribute to help us move in that direction.

I: Yes, okay, interesting. So, you provided a concrete guide on how they can participate in the project. In your opinion, how does leadership communication in a hybrid or remote work environment differ from traditional face-to-face communication in the office? How would you assess it? Or are the technologies so advanced that it makes no difference?

P10: No, it is indeed different. Especially at the beginning, when it was all new, we tried to integrate various tools and aids. We had remote coffee breaks where we all met at nine and just chatted. We experimented with different approaches. We also had hybrid meetings where some participants were on-site, and others were at home. We found that this was challenging. I would say that a hybrid meeting is still preferable to a purely remote meeting, but a physical meeting remains my preferred solution. This is because interaction is easier, you can observe people's behavior, and pick up on subtle cues, such as body posture. The whole interaction is simply more direct from my perspective. I mean, I am obviously quite old (laughing), and it might be different for your generation, but personal communication is just the most natural.

I: Yes, I totally understand that.

P10: These hybrid meetings often had the drawback that, since some employees were not physically present, they were either forgotten or felt neglected and couldn’t easily jump in and contribute. This also relates to the technical limitations. You couldn't see everyone, as we mostly shared a document.

I: Yes, yes.

P10: When you share a document and present, you can no longer see the others. And when presenting without seeing how others are reacting, you don't know if they understood, if they look skeptical, or if everyone is nodding along. Essentially, from my perspective, it's more difficult and less effective because it's a one-way communication rather than a give-and-take. There are advantages, but I have also seen some drawbacks. Maybe in five years, ten years, or probably even next year, better solutions will be found. It will continue to improve. But at the moment, the optimal solution for me is still the physical meeting.

I: Yes, but so far, this kind of barrier-free communication is something that probably can’t be fully replicated by any technology. At least not yet.

P10: Yes, as a leader, there were times when I couldn't be sure that everyone who had dialed in was truly engaged or not simultaneously reading their emails or doing other things. It's quite easy to appear present, so to speak, but not actually be fully involved.

I: Yes, definitely. I’m not sure how frequently these meetings occur, given that you have the day when you come together in the office. But in a hybrid meeting, what are the key factors to consider in order to make it at least better?

P10: They do occur more frequently; everyone has their own circles and meetings, but I've conducted them quite often. We don't only have internal meetings, but also meetings within the corporation, where our colleagues are in Paris, Munich, or elsewhere. This certainly makes it easier to see each other at least visually more often without having to make an entire trip. That's clear, but on the other hand, the same issues still exist. So (…) what exactly was your question again?

I: Are there key factors that you would say are particularly important for making communication more effective in hybrid meetings or virtual environments?

P10: I think it's crucial to explicitly involve everyone from the beginning, to greet them, ensure that everyone is punctual when the meeting starts, and that everyone knows the agenda. These are organizational aspects that might sometimes be seen as less important, but they are actually vital for the efficiency and effectiveness of the meeting. It's also important to periodically engage remote participants, perhaps even more frequently than those who are physically present, as you can see through gestures like nodding whether they are engaged or in agreement. This should be actively solicited from the others as well, and their commitment should be checked. It's beneficial if remote participants also contribute, which makes them visibly part of the discussion. We also kept an online record of the minutes so that after the meeting, it was immediately clear to everyone what the outcomes were and what was promised. This is a key factor for an effective meeting, whether it's hybrid or in-person. And, of course, the technical prerequisites must be met.

I: I'll come back to the technological prerequisites later.

P10: What else (…)

I: If you say these are the most important points for you, that's already very insightful. I would like to discuss the topic of communication challenges with you. We have already touched on some aspects, but perhaps you have additional thoughts on the specific challenges you see in communicating with employees in different work models?

P10: Yes, one point that I haven't mentioned yet, but which is important to me, is the sense of fairness towards all employees. Particularly in production and logistics, employees don't have the opportunity to work remotely. They might perceive this as favoritism when others are allowed to stay home. They might imagine it as very comfortable and see only the advantages that others have, without recognizing any disadvantages, which they don't experience.

I: Yes.

P10: This means that it is also necessary to explain and create a sense of fairness for why some people have the opportunity to do something that others cannot. In five years, this will probably no longer be an issue because everyone will be familiar with and accustomed to it. However, at the moment, employees are not used to some having different attendance requirements than others, and this needs to be explained and addressed. Other challenges... well, there are certainly the purely technical challenges related to hybrid work.

I: Yes.

P10: And then there's the issue of how to measure work time or how work time is accounted for – how long am I present? This is ultimately an HR issue. Also relevant are things like the sickness rate. I just read an article yesterday about how the sickness rate has developed in Germany, and it has significantly increased on average over the past year. Interestingly, our rate has actually decreased significantly over the last year. But overall, the sickness rate in Germany has risen sharply, and it was also questioned how employees make that famous "bedside decision" in the morning when deciding whether to go to work or not. Do I feel well enough or are my headaches so severe that I can't work? Is this decision different when working remotely compared to going to the office? Is it easier to work when I only need to go to my home office rather than having to travel to the office? It was also suggested that such decisions might differ, not only in the direction of thinking it's easier for me because I don't have to commute, so I can work and I'm not infecting anyone, but also the consideration that I might stay home or call in sick to avoid infecting others.

I: Yes.

P10: It has also become quite modern to use this as a convenient excuse, framed in a very altruistic way, where the others benefit because I'm taking on the sickness and staying home. So, all of this can also be influenced by the work model I'm in.

I: Definitely. Definitely.

P10: One also needs to consider how to handle this, how to account for work hours, how to calculate break times for part-time employees, and so on. At home, we didn't have the technical capability for clocking in and out. We had trust-based working hours, so that had to be taken into account. Also, in terms of general communication—not just during COVID or hybrid work—it's important to remember that much of the communication is not only electronic but also physical, such as through posters or other means.

I: Different communication channels. Exactly.

P10: And those who are not physically present don't easily pick up on this. Remote workers rely on significantly fewer channels. Although there are now more channels like Teams meetings, you're familiar with that much better than I am, not all are covered.

I: Yes, that's definitely a factor.

P10: On the other hand, even for those working within the company, new communication channels that are not visible, such as electronic ones like Teams channels, we created for various topics, need to be adjusted to and used effectively.

I: Definitely. How do you view the issue of information transfer? When you are together in the office, you can quickly discuss things, sit down together, speed up processes, or share expertise. Would you say that digital information provision is more challenging to implement?

P10: I wouldn't want to limit myself exclusively to digital methods. I believe that personal, physical interaction is still very important. We are all equipped with eyes and ears for a reason, and some find digital methods easier, while others do not. Age can sometimes make a difference in this regard.

I: Generational question.

P10: Yes. Personally, I also found it somewhat confusing initially, as I was used to handling a lot through email for written communication. Then suddenly, there were many different channels through which information was received or expected. I had the impression, why does it need to be this way? I already have many emails per day; why do I now have to manage two or three additional channels or check what's happening there? On the other hand, there are advantages, such as having topic-specific groups or sharing files and creating spaces where a specific circle of colleagues discusses certain issues. But I must admit, it took me a bit of time to adapt and see the benefits, which I now appreciate. And I probably still haven't recognized all of them and am not an expert in this area.

I: And of course, there's still personal preference. But let me carry forward the momentum we have here regarding technologies. What technologies or tools, meeting platforms, and communication methods do you use?

P10: You mean electronic ones, right?

I: Yes, exactly.

P10: Well, first, the good old email, Teams meetings, and also various Teams channels. You know those, right?

I: Yes, I do.

P10: Then (…) there are clouds, where we share data in certain areas and have shared folders. And then (…) there are other tools in the company (…) they weren't tweets, but I don't remember what they were called.

I: Was it a chat platform?

P10: Yes, there were chat platforms, and there are also meetings that aren't Teams meetings. For example, when the board communicates with a thousand employees simultaneously, other tools are used that allow for both sending and discussing.

I: Okay. Is the suitability of these tools regularly reviewed or researched to find other possible options? Are there feedback mechanisms for employees to provide input on how well they are managing with these technologies and whether they meet their communication needs?

P10: The new tools were implemented company-wide to ensure everyone uses the same technology and that it is compatible. This was developed by the central communications and

IT department. There were corresponding training sessions, often online, and opportunities to provide feedback, make improvements, and refine the tools.

I: Okay. Are there additional measures, like the virtual coffee chats you mentioned earlier, that are being taken to bring the team together virtually? Or has this hybrid work setup, where you had specific days for coming together, made these initiatives less necessary?

P10: Actions like those coffee chats have become less frequent. I can't think of any current initiatives along those lines, but there are many ideas, and HR continues to promote them.

I: Definitely. We're moving to the final part, which is about future developments. How do you see leadership communication evolving in these work models? Do you believe there will be a stronger shift towards remote work, and what does this mean for leadership communication?

P10: I'm sure it will continue to evolve, improve, and become even easier, faster, and more flexible to communicate with increasingly user-friendly tools. Both direct communication and the use of various databases will benefit. I could also see AI playing a role in this. I believe that as these tools become simpler or more user-friendly, they will become more effective, offering new visualization options or new combinations of video, sound, and images. This will make communication simpler and more attractive. There will likely be many more opportunities emerging quickly that will influence and ease leadership communication. Some fundamental challenges will probably remain the same, such as how to involve everyone even if they have different technical, mental, or physical conditions, and how to bring them together as a team and steer them in the same direction.

I: Yes. Would you say there is a key factor in leadership communication that you would recommend?

P10: Yes. Employees will never be on the same level, but we have to include everyone, despite their different conditions. We need to address everyone and not forget the human element. We must address them personally so that everyone feels included.

I: Yes, supporting the human aspect.

P10: Exactly.

I: Thank you very much for your detailed answers. That was the last question of my interview. Are there any additional points you would like to discuss on this topic?

P10: Okay. We are right on time. No, I have said everything from my side.

I: Okay, wonderful. That fits perfectly. I'll now end the recording.

(Farewell and Closing Remarks)

E.4 Interview 11

Interview: 11
Role: CEO
Company: ILUXI
Industry: Luxury
Duration: 47:00
Date: 22.07.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: Let's start with some background information. Could you provide some details about the company you work for and the industry in which it operates?

P11: The company where I am the CEO is called ILUXI GmbH, based in Hamburg. The industry is textile and luxury fashion retail, and in this case, it's online.

I: Okay. And what is your working model? Do you work fully on-site, hybrid, or remote?

P11: I actually work fully on-site, unless I'm traveling. I'm one of those who doesn't like to work from home. It's a point where many people are different, of course. But I switch into a different mode when I'm in the office, in an environment where I have access to things, technology, and other employees. So, I would say I do have some travel in between, but when I work and have the choice, I always opt for the office.

I: Okay. And how many employees do you manage?

P11: Seven.

I: Do they work remotely, hybrid, or on-site most of the time?

P11: Remote.

I: Remote. Fully remote, or do they also work partially in a hybrid model?

P11: Well, no one is fully remote because we have many part-time employees. One is with Google and has one day where she works for another company, so she comes to our office on that day because she wants to stay connected. Another is a freelancer in Berlin. Our graphic designer works remotely but occasionally comes to Hamburg for work alignment or briefing meetings. So, it's actually a wild mix. Among the seven full-time employees, most work in the office, with only a few working remotely part-time. But we also have many freelancers, about five, six, or seven, who are primarily remote.

I: Okay.

P11: So, I wasn't entirely precise earlier.

I: Understood. And how would you describe the importance of leadership communication for yourself personally? Do you have a strategic approach to it?

P11: Yes, there are regular meetings. Especially in a startup, there's an incredible need to produce a lot. Sometimes it's challenging for people who haven't been in a larger company to handle things professionally. This means classic communication in terms of informing, coordinating, getting approvals, or discussing larger topics in a broader group. But with a startup, I believe it's almost impossible to work remotely, at least initially, because communication plays a crucial role here. In our company, for example, there are four distinct areas. One is E-Com, which deals with everything related to the online shop. The second is Product, which is essential because nothing works without the product. The third is Finance, which is the backbone that must be maintained and managed. The fourth is what I would call Marketing, which includes everything related to sales and promotional activities, both on the shop and in the surrounding environment. These four areas are extremely interdependent. For instance, if the marketing team doesn't understand the brand, it can create issues if those in finance, customer service, or E-Com don't grasp the brand's impact on their respective areas. When you start a new company, no one knows what ILUXI is. You might have some idea if you've seen a store or an ad, but when you're setting up a startup, it's crucial that everyone – whether in finance, customer service, or branding – understands the brand and its impact on their specific area. If you compare a corporate company with thousands of employees to a startup, the necessity for communication and overall exchange is far more critical in a startup. In a large company with over 100,000 employees and numerous locations, communication is vastly different than when you're trying to create a space, sometimes more than just an office, where you can communicate effectively. We have many opportunities for spaces that might not typically be found in a larger company, where communication can happen in various ways. For example, we have a large meeting room that can accommodate ten people, and we often hold informal internal meetings as needed.

I: Would you say that, in a virtual environment, there is a need for more or more frequent communication compared to when everyone is in the office together?

P11: Yes, definitely. In a virtual environment, the learning curve is much steeper. For instance, everyone who is here eventually has gaps in their knowledge—they need to get to know the product, understand the brand, and interact with others. This interaction is challenging to achieve remotely. For example, we have some employees who live in Düsseldorf and Berlin, and they might work remotely for part of the time. Even if someone is only physically present for one day a week, we often have to communicate multiple times a day via phone or Teams meetings. This is a normal working day and involves frequent interactions. In a startup environment, it's crucial that everyone interacts closely to understand the brand and the product fully. The technology allows for this, but it's still different from being physically present. For those who live in Hamburg, they are usually in the office every day and seek out interactions with others. This direct interaction is easier when everyone is on-site. The startup's size and the need for everyone to be familiar with what's happening make in-person communication more effective. While it might be easier to manage remote work as the company grows and becomes more structured, currently, it's just not feasible for us.

P11: I do not believe that this has to do with the virtual environment but rather with the startup phase, where everything is new. When everything is new, it's challenging to find a common ground where team members can play together and train until they find their rhythm. Only then can changes be considered. The interaction between different areas is necessary at the beginning to coordinate and set up the project comprehensively, and this can only be done effectively when people are physically close. Of course, things have evolved, especially during the pandemic, so today it is no longer entirely office centric. However, the focus remains on the office, and this will eventually change once the team becomes more established and perhaps grows.

I: Okay, so would you be open to the possibility of working less in the office? Yes, absolutely. Okay, those are definitely some good points regarding communication challenges. Are there any specific challenges in the startup environment that you are currently facing with communication, or would you say that when everyone is in the office and connected, it works wonderfully? Is there anything you would suggest improving or doing differently?

P11: This is clearly related to the leadership style and perhaps the human resources policies. I've never worked within a predefined framework, which might be sensible in some cases. Instead, I've built structures based on the individuals involved. For instance, we couldn't find a Head of E-commerce, so we had two applicants for the same position: one with a strong background in content and another who was a classical IT specialist with a stronger technological focus. The decision was whether to prioritize someone with expertise in managing the Shopify store and programming, or someone who could develop content and build the brand but lacked technical knowledge. We ended up creating two parallel roles: Head of Web and Head of Brand, as well as Head of Finance and Head of Product, and organized the structure around the available employees. When you do this, you naturally increase the need for communication. Communication is actually the most challenging aspect in a startup because when you're just two or three people starting out, it's manageable. You might spend a long time developing the idea, securing funding, or getting support from family. But when you're building a growth story and need to hire three, four, or five more employees, the situation becomes much more demanding. If you don't have an organization that motivates, supports, and encourages each other, nothing will work. If these people were working from home, I don't know how it would function. Yes, if you want to build a modern company that includes a remote work factor, that's certainly possible. Many people think it should be like that. However, it's different when, for example, someone in the branding role doesn't understand the brand. If you don't understand the brand, you can't be the Head of Brand. This becomes evident when you constantly have to intervene in newsletters, texts, or visualizations. The person was just a bit too casual and not international enough. That's our problem: many people who come here have experience in small companies, and those from large companies like Tchibo or Otto often struggle with the startup mentality. They find it difficult to adapt. I've worked in such companies and know how it is. There's a significant loss of energy due to communication issues, as it's often organized in a way that isn't natural. For example, if there's a problem with a new collection that needs to be reflected in the imagery and uploaded, you go to the next room and ask, "Hey, do you have a moment to help with this?" In a startup, communication is essential. If it doesn't work and people can't agree, it won't succeed. We have an open-door policy; the office is spacious, and we maintain a somewhat Scandinavian culture where doors are left open, except when someone

is on a call or having a confidential conversation. Then everyone knows not to disturb. Only Miria, who manages the office, can enter if the door is closed because it signifies something urgent or important. The challenge is that you can't formalize communication. It evolves over time, but some people might not ask for help or might believe they know everything and try to dictate how the brand should function. Others might not be strong enough, and addressing this requires communication. I keep emphasizing that communication is crucial. For those who don't live in Hamburg, it also works on the days they aren't present. There are many freelancers who specialize in specific areas like analytics, graphic design, or text. They come in sporadically, and it doesn't matter whether they are physically present or working via Teams or Zoom. They deliver their work as requested. Some freelancers eventually become permanent employees. This dynamic greatly impacts communication within the company.

I: Yes. Since you mentioned Zoom and Teams, are these your primary communication channels for internal communication? Or is it mainly Teams? Or do you use other tools as well?

P11: No, no. Teams is primarily what we use. We also have many meetings on Teams, especially on Fridays when people are working from home. When people are in the office, we don't need it as much.

I: Understood. And regarding future developments, which is the last part of the interview, how do you see the future of leadership communication, especially with the increasing popularity of hybrid and remote work models? Do you think the on-site aspect will diminish or perhaps disappear, or do you believe it will evolve in a different direction? What is your assessment?

P11: I believe that the location of the people isn't as important as what they are doing and how they contribute to the results. If you have someone who is merely a supplier, they will just pick up tasks, complete them, and deliver. However, if someone is engaged in proactive activities, such as thinking along, making decisions, and developing things, they need to be integrated in a completely different way, especially in small companies where they need to be involved in all areas. We actually need generalists rather than specialists because, when you start, you do everything yourself. Then new people come in, and as the company grows, you begin to specialize and create distinct areas of expertise. We are currently in this process. Communication isn't just about the size of the company. It's important to distinguish between communication in large versus small companies or corporate versus startup environments. Startups require a different communication approach due to their evolving nature. There are content-related differences in communication, with good communication involving clear goal setting, task definition, process tracking, and results verification. For example, the Head of Brand who didn't work out was continuously running tests for social media activities or marketing initiatives, like Google Shopping. However, she didn't properly define the goals of these tests, which is also a communication issue. Testing should have a clear objective, cost, and expected outcome—whether it's increased sales, customer engagement, or better brand awareness. Without clear goals, results become arbitrary and less useful. This also highlights a content-related communication problem. The approach depends on whether you're dealing with a leader who manages other employees or a junior staff member with no leadership experience. The same applies to interacting with

stakeholders such as advisors, investors, or service providers. In a high-complexity environment, constant communication is crucial; otherwise, leadership fails. Leadership communication involves considering various factors, such as company size, content, and the employee's experience. For instance, a person with extensive experience may insist on methods they've always used, while someone new might question existing practices and challenge you, which I actually appreciate. Some people don't listen well, only retain part of the information, or don't take notes. Effective leadership communication means guiding someone through the overall context of company development towards a specific goal. It's not just about whether a company is large or small, but also about who you are communicating with, the content, and the stage of development with the employees. Do you need to explain a lot or very little? For example, we used to have a one-hour meeting every morning at 9 AM to distribute tasks and discuss daily goals. This is challenging for many people. Some come to work without a plan and see what happens, which I find problematic. I would suggest they look for another job if they can't work with a plan. People without a plan struggle, as they end up wandering around and reflecting on what they could have done differently. All of this is related to leadership communication. As you know, it's a very complex topic.

I: Are there certain qualities or attributes that an effective leader should have, especially now that there is a gap between virtual and in-office management?

P11: There are differences that are not necessarily related to the individual leader but rather to the environment in which they operate. Factors like the level of pressure, the company's financial status, and implementation issues all influence the leader. In high-pressure situations, lengthy explanations may not work. If you're older and have good nerves, and if you've done this several times before, it's somewhat easier, but for others who struggle, it becomes frustrating for the leader. It's similar to a soccer team: if there's no one in the midfield with creative ideas, the forward won't get any chances, no matter how well they play. Leading, therefore, can be challenging regardless of the leader's influence. Leadership requires having or developing a clear vision with the people you lead. In terms of content, if you're asking what is crucial, openness is important. Modern leadership is not about giving orders or strictly adhering to job descriptions but about listening and being open to opinions. Finding a way to exchange ideas is essential. You might not have five hours to listen, but it's also not effective to issue orders without understanding their purpose. In a startup, every contribution is vital, and decisions must be made quickly. If someone is missing, you need to quickly reassess and redistribute tasks, coordinating with a larger team than just one person.

P11: In marketing, for example, tasks are divided among several people, adding complexity to communication. The key is whether the leader communicates enough and includes a feedback loop to verify what went into the process versus what came out. Understanding why results differ, or why something was more expensive or took longer, is essential. Controlling is about steering, not just monitoring. Good leadership involves gathering talented people around you, and high standards can sometimes make this challenging. You can't constantly explain the basics, especially if you're short on time. I enjoy working with enthusiastic and passionate young people because it makes explaining things worthwhile. However, if someone is unmotivated and unengaged, communication won't be effective. For example, there was a case where someone was given a free hand with three positions but

couldn’t find suitable candidates. Despite having over a hundred applications for six positions, the interview process was disappointing. I won’t bore you with the details, but it was the worst interview I’ve ever had.

I: No, I’m interested in hearing more.

P11: Well, this person had only been with us for about five or six months, which is a problem. As we all know, legally, you can't be fired after just six months, so typically, you end up letting someone go before they hit that mark. If someone has only been with us for five or six months or even less, it’s usually because there was an issue, and they were sent home early.

I: Yes, I understand.

P11: So, I asked him why he wanted to leave. He had just started at a small company that had received funding from “Höhle der Löwen” (German TV show about innovations). He couldn't even name the investor. I knew who was in the jury, and it turned out it was Ralf Dümmel (Host of the TV show). So, I asked him why he wanted to change jobs so soon. He said he didn't want to work on weekends anymore and wanted to focus solely on his private activities during his free time. I asked how much he worked on weekends and what he did. He hesitated and then said he worked about an hour, managing newsletters. He wanted to avoid working on weekends.

I: Oh, I see.

P11: It’s tough when you have someone who has three friends and just hangs out with them, lacks direction, and doesn’t even know which companies are on the platform or who the investors are. Even the best communication won’t help if you’re in such a situation. Communication is interactive – it’s about give and take, and leadership communication involves setting goals and ensuring that all employees contribute towards them. Startups often blend personal and work life, and it doesn't matter where people are located because they are deeply involved in the work. For rapid scaling, you need a system that allows for growth without constant changes. Achieving this is a huge challenge. More communication is needed, and while it’s not hard for me to communicate, it’s more effective when there’s a reciprocation from the other side. If one person is talking and the other has nothing to say, you start to wonder if they’re truly interested. That’s what matters most. So, if you go back and think about it, leadership communication involves content, the size of the company, and the engagement of the people involved. Whether communication is remote or on-site, all these factors need to be considered to assess its effectiveness.

I: That’s a perfect conclusion. That was my last question. Thank you very much.

P11: I hope I haven’t worn you out. I hope you’re not just relieved that it’s over.

I: Not at all. I’m ending the recording now.

(Farewell and Closing Remarks)

E.5 Interview 12

Interview: 12
Role: Retail Manager
Company: LVMH (Moët Hennessy – Louis Vuitton SE)
Industry: Chemicals
Duration: 44:29
Date: 26.06.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: Let's start by having you tell me which company you work for, what position you hold, and the work model you're working in.

P12: Sure. I am responsible for retail operations at Tag Heuer Central Europe in Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands. I essentially oversee all aspects of boutique management, including operational excellence, HR matters, and P&L responsibilities for each boutique. However, my role is not limited to the boutiques; I also manage the entire 360-degree retail experience. For instance, events are a major part of my responsibilities. I mostly work in a hybrid model, with two fixed office days and otherwise trying to visit the boutiques regularly since my teams are spread across three countries. Additionally, I travel frequently to Switzerland, Paris, or wherever we are scouting new locations or hosting events. No week is the same.

I: How many people are on your team?

P12: I have eight direct reports, and in total, there are 32 team members.

I: How long have you been working this way? Has the way you work and the frequency of your office presence changed due to COVID, or has this travel-intensive nature of your role always been the case?

P12: It has always been a travel-intensive role. I took on the position during COVID, specifically in 2021. I told the Managing Director for Central Europe that I needed career development, and at that time, I was also the first retail manager in Europe. Back then, we only had two boutiques, so I traveled a lot but also lived in Munich, which meant I was very rarely in the office. At that time, I didn't have any employees in the office, so I worked 100% remotely. Since I moved to Frankfurt and also had employees directly in the office, I shifted my approach. But it is definitely a travel-heavy position. When your team is dispersed everywhere, the team doesn't just come to you; you also need to go to the team.

I: Right. Let's move directly to leadership communication. How would you describe the role of leadership communication in your management style? Do you place a lot of importance on it?

P12: Absolutely, 1000%. I aim to speak with each of my direct reports at least three times a week. Even if it's just a quick "Good morning, Happy Friday, are you satisfied with your

week, ready for the weekend, remember to leave a bit earlier today." It's about signaling that you are present, that you are not someone who only checks in every two weeks in a critical manner, but rather that you are an active part of their work life, whether you are physically present or not. Whether it's checking sales, calling the boutique to express how proud you are, or sending an email where I'm CC'd to see if an employee needs support. My phone is never more than 10 centimeters away. We also have an emergency hierarchy for responses: emails should be answered within 24 hours, Teams messages within three hours, and WhatsApp within 20 minutes because it's crucial. This way, everyone knows the level of urgency and importance we're dealing with.

P12: Extremely important. It's not just about communication between me and my direct reports, but also among the direct reports as a team. It's important to me that every Monday, everyone comes together for a one-hour call. I spend the first half hour covering our topics, but I also ask, "What's on your mind? What would you like to share with everyone? Is there anything you need from the people in this call?" It's also just an opportunity to have a coffee together.

I: That leads to the next question. It sounds like you follow a strategic approach.

P12: 100 percent. Everyone has a weekly one-on-one with me for at least 30 minutes. This is more focused on the individual performance of the boutique or on KPIs. These meetings are highly individualized based on what's currently a priority for each boutique. Then, in the afternoon, everyone comes together for the team meeting. While Mondays are blocked off for this, it ensures that everyone starts the week well-informed and it's also important to review the previous week. In fact, all boutique managers are so accustomed to this routine that if I'm traveling and we can't have our Monday meeting, the week feels off. It's really an ingrained ritual for everyone. It's a must to start the Monday this way. If I'm not available, the Retail Roundtable, or this one-hour meeting, still takes place without me. A person from Finance then receives the KPIs and explains them to the team. Everyone brings their important topics to the table. I receive a summary afterward, and that's it.

I: That's great. So, your strategic approach has essentially been transferred to the team.

P12: Absolutely.

I: What would you say are the key factors for effective leadership communication? What needs to be in place to communicate effectively with the team?

P12: Sometimes, it's just quick and to the point. For example, it's perfectly fine to spend 10 minutes chatting casually, but in business matters, you need to be sharp and direct. At the beginning, it was challenging, especially for retail employees who are used to a lot of small talk. But with tools like WhatsApp, if I need information, I might not say, "Hello, how are you? I hope you had a nice evening," but rather, "Is the customer coming today? Is the payment confirmed? Thanks, goodbye." It's a bit of an adjustment, but it's crucial to communicate clearly and transparently. If I'm short on time, I'll say, "I'm pressed for time right now; how can I support you?" This way, everyone knows where they stand. Transparent communication is key. If you need time to chat, let me know, and you'll get it. But sometimes, it needs to be efficient and to the point.

I: Would you say that different factors are important for you in different work models?

P12: Yes. I've actually instituted a phone ban during in-person meetings because I find it annoying when everyone is constantly multitasking. I've seen this with my own leader—only half of what's said is understood. I find it disrespectful to the speaker who is sharing information. We're not saving lives; everything can wait half an hour. It's very important to have this focus when we're all together, even in leadership meetings. If something urgent comes up, the employee sitting next to you can be informed, but otherwise, I believe in a phone ban or not constantly writing in Teams. Of course, it's different in other settings. When you see each other all day, the one-on-one meetings are more focused on business because you've already had your personal conversations before and after.

I: Yes, so you would say that when you're on-site, the personal exchange naturally happens at some point.

P12: Absolutely, and that's why it's more efficient.

I: Yes, okay, I understand.

P12: And you can also be much more creative. There's a difference between communicating with an employee over the phone and conducting a mini-workshop, versus having someone in the office and saying, "Hey, we both have an hour free; let's think completely out of the box about how we might reorganize the task you need to complete by the end of the week." I find that being on-site fosters more creativity. It also has a stronger impact on you. If you have any questions afterward, you can just go to the office next door and ask them.

I: Yes, definitely. I'll come back to that when we talk about challenges. Are there any specific practices you use to keep your team motivated or to provide incentives?

P12: I have a very strong celebration mindset. Everything is always great, and everything needs to be highlighted. That's a strategy, yes. But I think it's better when it comes from within. If it's something where I know I'm not naturally inclined to but am doing it because I have to, it's a bit more challenging. So, we celebrate everything, and if I'm not feeling up to it on a particular day, I know which employees have a similar profile to mine and I'll text them, "Hey, today I'm not feeling it, please be my cheerleader." This celebration of special highlights within the group significantly strengthens the sense of community and group dynamics, and it usually lifts the mood of others who know that something great has happened, even if they're not directly involved. Additionally, I think it's important to give attention throughout the day. For example, if we had an event at one of the boutiques yesterday, I'll send a message the next morning saying, "I'm really proud, it went so well, I can't wait to see the photos." It takes me ten seconds and makes someone else happy for an hour.

I: Yes, definitely.

P12: And not just celebrating everything as great, but also asking, "What could we improve next time? What can we do differently?" So, it's not only about celebrating achievements.

And indeed, as you mentioned, criticism discussions virtually are quite a challenge. That's very hard to perform.

I: Yes, I'll ask more about that shortly. But generally speaking, what are the biggest challenges you face with your team when you need to communicate virtually?

P12: I think it's about conveying emotions.

I: Yes.

P12: Also, keeping track of everything. For example, at the end of the month, I need to know whether each person has reached 100% of their targets or not, or if they are close. I have to spend about 10 minutes each day reviewing where I can give feedback. When we're on-site together, I get real-time feedback and can address issues immediately.

I: Yes, definitely.

P12: And the attention span decreases when working remotely. It happens automatically; you can't ensure that everyone will stay focused on the screen and listen for 20 minutes when you're presenting numbers. You can influence this when you're physically present, but I can't address individuals by name every time I see someone looking away, checking their phone, or reading an email. There are too many distractions when working remotely.

I: Yes, would you say that fully remote work doesn't work for you in your industry?

P12: Yes. I could never forgo seeing my team in person. That would be a definite no-go for me. It's like not seeing your partner all the time. Eventually, you stop communicating. So yes, definitely.

I: Do you think this is also related to the luxury industry, where communication plays a significant role, for example, in sales or product marketing?

P12: Absolutely. I also believe this is why everyone enjoys working with us so much, because we have this team interaction. When you work only remotely, you can't generate that team spirit. I recently saw a LinkedIn post where a leader mentioned that they don't have an office anymore; all their teams work remotely from all over the world. However, every three months, they come together for a week, usually in Mallorca, renting a house and conducting workshops. You can't tell me that meeting every three months creates the same strong team dynamics as seeing each other daily or weekly. It doesn't work for me because strong team dynamics come from being present for both the highs and lows.

I: Yes.

P12: And I can't spend three hours a day calling colleagues to explain my ups and downs.

I: That supports my participant research. I haven't been able to find a single person in the luxury industry who works fully remotely.

P12: I don't think that exists in the luxury industry. I can't imagine it. First, because headquarters play a significant role. In the luxury industry, having a stylish, cool office is a standard. I don't know of any luxury brand that operates entirely remotely. For instance, at our company, there are subsidiaries like Northern, East, and South Experts, covering Scandinavian countries, Greece, and Sicily – areas where the company doesn't have direct markets. Even they don't work remotely. Even in these cases, there are two people from the team in Paris and two in Switzerland. They also have fixed workplaces.

I: Yes, that's interesting.

P12: And especially then, you have to look at how to keep people motivated.

I: Yes, definitely. You spend so much of your life at work.

P12: Chanel has a huge headquarters with over 200 employees. Hermes has a large headquarters in Munich and, of course, also in Paris. All LVMH maisons have large headquarters as well.

I: Yes, of course. So, would you say, just to finalize this point, that managing your employees in a personal environment where you're all together is easier for you than in a hybrid or remote setup?

P12: Yes, definitely.

I: Okay, wonderful. Now I'd like to revisit the topic of feedback. Are feedback opportunities provided?

P12: Definitely.

I: How does this feedback process work at your company? And do you adjust your communication approaches based on the feedback you receive from your employees?

P12: I don't give critical feedback via WhatsApp because you spend so much time worrying about how to phrase it correctly. How can you express it in a way that still motivates? And then, once I've done my part, it starts with the person receiving the feedback. They end up interpreting it, just like I did initially.

I: Yes, of course.

P12: And it doesn't stop there; they might discuss it with their partner that evening, sending screenshots and expressing frustration. It's far too unnecessary for everyone involved. Therefore, I always provide feedback over the phone so I can gauge their reaction and how their voice changes. If it's something extremely critical and we've already discussed it a few times, it's also a topic I address in person. I find virtual feedback sessions extremely difficult because you don't see the full body language of the other person. I mean, out of everything the recipient perceives, 8% is based on the words, 55% on body language, and the rest on the voice. Both the voice and body language are distorted through the camera. That's why virtual criticism conversations are a definite no-go for me. And if it's something serious, like

someone stealing three watches from the boutique, I fly there the next day. I also dislike it when there's awareness that a critical conversation is coming up, and people schedule a call for three weeks later when I'm there. I arrange the meeting with the store manager, and the person is informed the day before, "Hey, let's sit down and discuss this." Anything beyond that is absolute nonsense to me. I use email only to confirm the details of the conversation: "Thank you for your time today. I reiterate my position, your position, and the action plan. The next call is in three weeks."

I: But this is interesting because it transitions into the next section about tools and communication tools used. What would you say is your main communication tool within the team?

P12: WhatsApp. I believe between 10 to 15 messages are sent daily in our retail WhatsApp group.

I: Yes, okay, that's quite a lot. So, it's also the most frequently used tool.

P12: Absolutely. After that, it's Teams, but more for calls rather than Teams messages. I use Teams messages more for communication with people at headquarters or from our location in Oberursel (city of company location in Germany). Emails are reserved for extremely important matters or for anything official. For example, if I need to CC five people, or if it's something that concerns a large number of people who aren't in the retail group or involves communication with external partners.

I: Yes. How important do you think it is to choose the right tool for the right occasion? I imagine that can be challenging for leaders. There are so many communication channels to manage nowadays.

P12: I've tried to split them up so I know where to find the information later. For example, if I communicate with my superior, it's via WhatsApp, in a one-on-one chat. We have 30 different groups we are part of. We also communicate a lot via Instagram, sharing Reels from other brands that inspire us or things that make us laugh. Then, of course, there's Teams for individual chats, group chats, and emails. Sometimes, I can't remember where I've stored which piece of information.

I: Yes. It's impossible to keep track of everything.

P12: No, and when it comes to new product allocations, I initially had real difficulties understanding what quotas the team needed. Now, there's simply an allocation WhatsApp group with staff from the Sales Operations team, so the message goes directly to them instead of to me. It's much better when it's sorted and filtered this way.

I: Of course, definitely. Are there any additional measures you take to make this process clearer for your team?

P12: The measures really involve these different groups. I'm also currently challenging the morning briefing concept. Since we have small boutiques, it's important to me that communication also takes place in the boutique in the morning. How do you include

employees in this communication who are off today, sick, or on vacation? So that everyone is always updated, and I know that I haven't been there for the last three days, the store manager doesn't have to worry about it. It's an ongoing topic. Previously, it was really just about how to keep the person who is off work in the loop. Now, with people constantly on the move and dispersed, it needs to be much more thought-out than it was a few years ago.

I: Yes, so you would consider it a challenge and say that it's a disadvantage of being virtual and data driven.

P12: Yes, definitely.

I: Okay. Now, for the final part. In summary, what would you say makes effective leadership communication for you? What are the focal points?

P12: Clearly, structured communication is crucial. Consistency is key – so that it's not different today than tomorrow, and everyone knows the processes inside and out and what to expect. What is definitely also needed to lead a team is empathy, to read between the lines. But also, clear communication or awareness to say, if I'm short on time, it's not because I don't want to talk, but because I simply don't have the time. Nevertheless, one doesn't exclude the other. You need to be present. You can't work completely remotely; it doesn't work. The attention, especially in longer calls, is important. Challenging the interaction really happens when everyone is sitting around the table. For example, on Monday, I discussed products for 2025. If everyone had been in a room, it would have been, "Oh wow, look at this and look at that and the strap and the color." But if you show this in a call, it's silent, and everyone is on mute. You essentially mute yourself. So, if you're in a quiet room and you're in a large call, why should you put yourself on mute? It becomes a hurdle to unmute yourself. And then it's not a conversation but a monologue. The person also loses interest in accepting ideas or feedback from others.

I: Yes, of course.

P12: And of course, the issue of trust. If I didn't trust my team members, I wouldn't involve them with these high-quality products. Fortunately, I haven't encountered a situation where my trust was abused. I am extremely cautious at the beginning. Not everyone gets my complete trust immediately; they have to earn it.

I: Yes.

P12: However, if I were to say that I haven't spent five days with this person, then I couldn't judge them 100%. I don't know how one could build trust over a distance. It only happens through personal interaction. Yes. And seeing the person in various situations, in different moods. I mean, if I visit you today, you might be in a different mood than if I visit you the day after tomorrow. It's also about understanding what this person is really like and clarifying their values from the start.

I: Yes. Getting to know each other personally. Building a personal connection.

P12: I don’t want anyone to join my team unless they have been personally vetted by at least one person on the team. Whether it’s a sales associate or a working student, everyone is seen at least once in person by someone. If it’s someone with more responsibility, I want to see them live, and HR should see them live, and ideally, our managing director should see them live as well. Because one person might make a mistake, but five are less likely to. And the advantage is that our industry is relatively small, and since I’ve been in this industry for a long time, there’s always someone who knows the person applying to us.

I: Yes.

P12: To check whether this person can be trusted.

I: I believe otherwise, you wouldn’t be able to work effectively together.

P12: Exactly.

I: Moving on to the final question, how do you think this will evolve in the future? Do you believe the focus will shift back more towards presence? Do you think that in your industry, there’s no other way but perhaps a hybrid working model where a significant portion of work is still done in the office? How do you see this developing?

P12: I don’t think the requirement for office presence will ever disappear, at least for two days a week. We have also implemented fixed office days this year. We noticed that even if we mandate employees to be in the office on two days, it can still happen that one person comes in on Monday and Tuesday, another on Thursday and Wednesday, and yet another on Friday and Tuesday. Then you’re still alone. You don’t have the collective expertise together. That’s why it’s very clear to us: there are two office days. I’m also sure we will continue this practice. I frequently hear from other brands that they now have three to four office days. It’s increasing, and I am a strong advocate for it. I’m also confident that the concept of "workation" will be introduced by the end of the year. For example, Moet offers the possibility to work remotely from a European country for four weeks, but not consecutively – one week per quarter. Our media agency, with whom we collaborate, is spending the first six weeks of the year entirely with the team in Cape Town.

I: Yes, that’s incredible.

P12: It’s becoming more common. I believe the trend is moving towards the acceptance of "workation". I did it for a week, and it worked very well. Of course, as a supervisor, it makes me wonder if my employees are thinking, "Is she actually working?" I end up calling more frequently to show that I am working, which is completely nonsensical.

I: Yes, it’s a matter of trust, right?

P12: Exactly, trust that everyone is doing what they are supposed to. I also believe this will become more prevalent. Ultimately, I think there will be many different extremes. There will continue to be remote work; 100% office presence will never return. Otherwise, you wouldn’t be competitive, especially compared to other brands. If an employee values that, they will go elsewhere. I believe the concept of "workation" will continue to grow. Due to

costs, continuous travel might decrease slightly. It's completely varied. There is no monotonous trend.

I: Do you think there are certain leadership skills that will become even more important for this scenario?

P12: Yes, flexibility, trust, continuous communication, and having tasks that can be done remotely. But flexibility and willingness to compromise are definitely crucial. For example, I was supposed to be in Paris for a week in August, but I hadn't had it approved by my boss yet, and then yesterday I received an invitation for a workshop. I said I hadn't scheduled it yet, so it was my fault. However, I would like to have a compromise where the company benefits A, the employee benefits B, and everyone is happy. You need to be much more willing to compromise.

I: That was the last question. Very nice, thank you for your detailed answers. Is there anything else you would like to add?

P12: Wow, that was great, I enjoyed it. No, I think I've covered everything I wanted to say.

I: Alright, then I'll end the recording now.

(Farewell and Closing Remarks)

E.6 Interview 13

Interview: 13
Role: Marketing Management
Company: LVMH (Moët Hennessy – Louis Vuitton SE)
Industry: Luxury
Duration: 31:53
Date: 29.07.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: To start, could you tell me which organization you work for and in what role?

P13: I am a Marketing Manager at LVMH Watches & Jewelry, based in Oberursel. I oversee the TAG Heuer brand, managing it across the markets of Austria, the Netherlands, and Germany.

I: That's interesting. What kind of work model do you follow?

P13: I work in a hybrid model.

I: On average, how many days do you spend in the office, and how many days do you work from home?

P13: I aim to have one day of home office per week. The rest of the time, I'm either in the office or traveling.

I: Okay. How many people are currently on your team?

P13: I have three team members, in addition to myself. So, we're a total of four people on the team.

I: And how does your team work?

P13: They have three mandatory office days and two days where they can choose to work from home.

I: Do you coordinate so that the team is in the office simultaneously, ensuring that you see each other at least once a week?

P13: Yes, precisely. We have one mandatory presence day each week, which is Tuesday. On this day, everyone from all departments meets in the office. The purpose is to see people across departments, foster connections, and strengthen the work environment. Therefore, Tuesday is a fixed office day for everyone, unless they are traveling.

I: That naturally leads us to the next topic: strategy. Do you follow a strategic approach in your communication with your employees?

P13: Yes, for us, Tuesday is a crucial day. We also have our team meeting on that day. This means we have an hour where we all come together, especially in person, for the team meeting. Tuesday is also the day for cross-functional topics, where we meet with Retail and the Leadership Team. It's the day dedicated to presence. The other two days are flexible; the team can choose when they want to be in the office or work from home. But Tuesday is a key day for meetings, communication, and cross-functional tasks.

I: Okay, great. What are the key factors for you when you think about effective communication with your team? What aspects are important for the exchange?

P13: For me, precise and timely communication is essential. We need clear deadlines and effective cross-functional communication because our communication doesn't stop within the team; we interact with Supply, Retail, Finance, and it's crucial to have a continuous and precise communication flow where everyone is informed at the right time and the appropriate stakeholders are involved. This is important for every project. I need to know the status of certain projects, the pain points, and any red flags where we need to intervene. That's what our team meetings are for. It also relates to events; we don't organize events just for ourselves but to invite customers, communicate, and run social media campaigns. Everything has to work together, so having a clear communication flow is critical. Moreover, having a good team dynamic is important. We noticed this and that's why we introduced the Tuesday meeting at the beginning of the year. We observed that the team dynamic suffered when people didn't see each other due to varying in-office days. The sense of cohesion and team spirit was affected, and communication stalled. So, while precise and fact-based communication is crucial, it's also important to have casual interactions, like chatting by the

coffee machine about how your weekend was. We missed that. An email can quickly address what needs to be done tomorrow or details about an event, but the team feeling, and cohesion were lacking. That's why we established the Tuesday meeting.

I: While the in-person presence on Tuesdays might address some of what's missed during virtual days, are there specific aspects you pay attention to in virtual communication with your team? Are there particular things you focus on?

P13: Yes, virtual communication, as good as it is, does lose something in terms of body language and immediate reactions. It's not the same as being in a personal meeting. Clearly, there's a lack of the personal touch and trust that comes with face-to-face interactions. Virtual communication is very fact-based; you can resolve issues quickly, which is valuable, but it still doesn't replace the personal conversation and the sense of connection you get from being together in person.

I: Okay, definitely. Are there specific things you do to actively boost or at least maintain team motivation?

P13: Absolutely. We organize team evenings, and tomorrow we'll be grilling during lunch break. We also do activities like bowling or simply spending time together in the evenings. A crucial factor, I believe, is the lunch break. Sitting outside at a sunny table and enjoying lunch together is very important. Additionally, we recently partnered with a local gym. It's become a big thing here—who goes to the gym, when we exercise together—it's about camaraderie. This would be completely lost if we relied solely on remote work. Therefore, maintaining these informal communication lines, which may sometimes seem like just casual chats during lunch, is crucial for team cohesion. Many people think that they are wasting work time, but in reality, it's team building. So, it's a vital component.

I: Yes, definitely. This leads us to the next point: challenges. Lack of personal interaction is certainly one challenge. Are there other challenges in virtual communication within the team that impact how communication ultimately takes place, especially compared to being in the office?

P13: Yes. In marketing, the lack of creativity in a virtual space is a significant issue. This is due to several factors: the tactile experience of handling materials, the ability to create mood boards together, brainstorm, and have personal interactions. This clearly gets lost in virtual settings. It's more pronounced in marketing than in finance, where discussions might focus on P&L statements or balance sheets. In marketing, the absence of creative workshops and brainstorming sessions is a noticeable gap in virtual meetings.

I: How do you find the topic of information exchange? Is it challenging to convey information effectively?

P13: There are two aspects to consider: peers and headquarters or leadership teams. Nowadays, you end up with a vast number of calls in your calendar on topics that didn't used to be there. No one would have come to your office for a 45-minute discussion on issues that are now handled in calls. Sometimes, a call scheduled for an hour might only need five minutes to resolve. The volume of calls has become so high that finding time slots for

genuinely important discussions is challenging. Additionally, we have so many channels—Teams, WhatsApp, email, phone calls, and scheduled meetings—that it creates constant noise, and the traditional "sit down and work through tasks" approach gets lost. This is definitely a problem.

I: Yes, I can imagine that.

P13: In terms of the team, it's fundamentally a matter of trust. I'm not the type of leader who insists on logging in at 8 AM and then checks if the mouse is moving every 30 seconds. It's about trust. It's important that a leader knows that the tasks assigned are completed. This relies on having employees who can handle responsibility effectively. Some employees manage this well, while others do not. Some do better work when they are in the office, where they can fully concentrate. It's clearly a matter of trust and personality. You notice within the team that it works well for some people and less so for others. For example, I might prefer if someone who needs more direct communication and constant feedback were in the office four days a week and only worked from home one day. Continuous feedback and communication are crucial, and it's honest to say that a leader cannot provide the same level of feedback virtually as they can in person. It's quicker and more personal when done face-to-face, compared to scheduling a call, sending a message via Teams, and making additional phone calls. This immediate and personal contact is particularly important for employees who are still developing their skills, such as new coordinators or interns. I expect a manager to manage their workday independently, but this isn't something I can expect from someone in their first job or an intern. The level of development of the employee definitely plays a role.

I: Yes, would you say that adapting to each individual is a leadership skill that is now even more crucial, given the virtual component that plays a role today?

P13: Absolutely. It's much more about situational leadership now, and with situational leadership comes an additional dimension—virtual leadership. The challenge is to remember that even if I'm working from home on a 50-page presentation, I shouldn't forget that my team is also working, needing feedback, reminders, and responses. A leader must always be aware of this. Out of sight, out of mind can sometimes mean forgetting that there's a team that needs input or is facing challenges. In situational leadership, I need to assess how much support each employee needs, where they need it, and through which channel. It's crucial to remain active, present, and approachable as a leader, even if you are not physically in the same room.

I: Yes. Would you say that a fully remote working model is one that works well in the luxury industry, excluding roles that inherently require physical presence, like production and store staff?

P13: In the luxury industry, a fully remote model presents challenges. The industry relies heavily on personal interactions and physical presence, whether it's for maintaining high standards of customer service or for collaboration on creative projects. The tactile and experiential aspects of luxury goods, as well as the importance of face-to-face client relationships, make a fully remote model less feasible. While remote work can work well for some functions, such as administrative or certain strategic roles, the core aspects of the

luxury industry – like in-store customer experiences and hands-on product management – often require a physical presence. Therefore, while remote work can be part of the model, it's not likely to be fully effective for the industry as a whole.

P13: For me, a fully remote model wouldn't be an option for my team. I don't think it would work in any luxury sector, either. One exception might be accounting, which can function as a shared service. However, in the luxury industry, where creativity, service, excellence, and customer journey are key factors—many of which are more nuanced and intangible—a fully remote model is unlikely to succeed.

I: Okay, that's interesting to know. Thank you for your perspective.

P13: I believe that the mix is what makes it challenging. You either choose a model where everything is done together as a company, fostering team cohesion, or you opt for companies that emphasize benefits like workspace, commute, and employee satisfaction without compromising creativity and excellence. In such cases, a fully remote setup might work. However, for us, delivering high-value products with storytelling and emotional connection, this excellence cannot be achieved if there's no direct connection to the product and the team. We're selling values, not just a service, which is far more significant than just providing a service.

I: Yes, definitely. Let's bridge back to the topic of technologies, since you mentioned there are many different channels. What is your main channel for communication?

P13: I would say email is still our primary channel, with Teams as the second most used, and WhatsApp coming in third.

I: As you've hinted at, does the use of these many different channels introduce increased complexity? Do you find that it has become more complex since the virtual aspect has gained more importance?

P13: Yes. And actually, very, very rapidly. When I started here in 2018, the concept of Teams didn't even exist.

I: Yes, it's amazing.

P13: Nowadays, I'm involved in around 150 Teams groups, all lighting up every 30 seconds, plus everyone sends you a personal message, and from 8 a.m., it switches over to WhatsApp. Each channel has its peaks throughout the day depending on its current ranking. And on top of that, you still have Outlook, which hasn't changed. I also feel that the number of messages you receive in Outlook hasn't decreased because of Teams; instead, it's just added on top. There are definitely many people who use this channel somewhat excessively, and with the rapid adoption of Teams when COVID hit, not everyone really learned how to manage it properly. They were just thrilled to have it and used it extensively, and now they're slowly developing an awareness of where they need to filter, and when to assign different priorities, such as deciding if it's really necessary to have a call instead of just sending another email. Of course, Teams also helps to bring geographically separated teams closer together. That's a big advantage, and I wouldn't want to be without Teams today. But all tools come with an

awareness and responsibility regarding how we use them, and when we need to turn them off at times.

I: Yes. And is this also part of your communication with your employees, that you pay attention to how you manage this with your team?

P13: Absolutely. It's a rule in our team to communicate openly and ask, "Can this be done in fifteen minutes, or does it need to be an hour?" Many calls are set for an hour simply because that's the slot available. It's about maintaining efficiency while finding the right balance.

I: Yes. Do you have additional virtual activities, or do you just schedule them on the days you're in the office and have no specific meetings on virtual days that focus on personal exchange?

P13: I now only have virtual meetings with the headquarters due to geographic separation. Even then, virtual meetings often fall into this behavioral pattern where the sender sends, and the teams don't respond. Then there's the question of who turns on the microphone and who speaks, if I even give feedback, and how different it would be in a face-to-face setting.

I: Yes, that's really interesting. Regarding the last part, how do you think leadership communication will evolve in different work models in the future? Do you think the focus will remain hybrid, or will it shift more towards remote work? And what aspects of leadership communication or qualities of leaders do you think will become even more important?

P13: Many companies are going back to 100% physical presence, but I still believe that the hybrid model is here to stay because it has many advantages that we all benefit from. My work environment has expanded; I no longer need to commute 30 kilometers to work but can hire someone who lives 100 kilometers away, who might only need to commute once or twice a week. It could be a single mother who has her child at home. It offers much more freedom and possibilities in the pool of potential employees. This has many benefits, increases flexibility, and for some profiles, it can even be productivity-enhancing if you can fully focus at home and manage your tasks effectively. What's important is that we learn how to manage it—clearly defining when work starts and ends, and not being available 24/7. We need to understand how often to use different communication channels, and which messages are truly important to communicate. For leaders, situational leadership will be crucial, as well as balancing physical presence with managing remotely. Being present for team meetings and organizing them is one aspect, but leading from a distance, while keeping an eye on the interests of individuals and the team despite not being physically present, is also very important. Understanding the individuality of team members is key.

I: Yes. Very nice. That's a perfect conclusion. That was my last question.

P13: Wow.

I: Thank you for your great answers. Is there anything else we haven't covered that you would like to add?

P13: Very good, I enjoyed it a lot. No, I think we've covered everything.

I: Wonderful, I'll end the recording now.

(Farewell and Closing Remarks)

E.7 Interview 14

Interview: 14
Role: Head of Commercial
Company: Richemont SA
Industry: Luxury
Duration: 32:06
Date: 29.07.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: First question to start, in which company are you employed, what position do you hold there, and what is your work model?

P14: I am currently employed at Richemont Northern Europe, a company dedicated to luxury goods. I work for the brand Jaeger-LeCoultre as the Head of Commercial. This means I am responsible for both retail and wholesale. Retail involves our own stores and boutiques, while wholesale refers to our local partners. The core market I oversee is Germany, as well as Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, Austria, and the Netherlands.

I: Okay, great. And what is your work model?

P14: I am employed on-site.

I: Okay. Are you on-site during that time?

P14: I have an on-site contract, but I travel three days a week.

I: Okay. Do you also have home office days, or are those really just your travel days, and you spend the other days in the office?

P14: Those are my travel days. I can do one day of home office, which is up to me. If I want a second home office day, which is the maximum allowed, I need to request it from my supervisor. This rule applies to me even in management.

I: Okay, I understand. And how do your employees work?

P14: They are all either on-site or remote. This means they either work in the boutique or as area managers. The area managers have home office contracts and travel as part of their job.

I: Okay, got it. Now, regarding leadership communication, how important do you consider it for your leadership style?

P14: It is extremely important to me. It has always been the case in my previous positions as well. Communication is the be-all and end-all. You have to talk to people.

I: Definitely. Do you also meet in person?

P14: Yes, it's easier in the boutique because it's also in Munich. I am there every week, fixed on Tuesdays. With the area managers, it's a bit more flexible. However, I am on the road with each area manager for at least one week every month.

I: Okay. And would you say, comparing the days when you can communicate with people face-to-face in the boutiques and the days when communication is online, where do you place your focus? Do you pay attention to different things when communicating virtually versus in person?

P14: I try to maintain a similar style of communication in both settings. Efficiency is very important to me, especially working time-efficiently. Nevertheless, you need to maintain a personal level. So, you always have your two or three moments where you first ask how things are going, what's new, etc. But this is naturally much easier in a face-to-face conversation because you spend a whole day or half a day together, not just a 30-minute slot.

I: Yes.

P14: I also think, and this is probably universal, that when you're sitting next to each other or in the same room, it's easier to have personal conversations because you don't have this virtual barrier between you. What I've noticed is that communicating remotely via video call creates even more distance than talking on the phone. These are two different things for me. In terms of efficiency, both personally and jobwise, in-person is the best, in my opinion. The next best is the phone. It's somehow more relaxed and comfortable to talk to people. It doesn't have the formal atmosphere of sitting at a laptop, dialing into a call, waiting for the other person to join, and making an appointment, you know what I mean?

I: Yes, definitely. Do you have a certain strategy behind your leadership communication? Do you plan it strategically, or does the communication occur more spontaneously due to the many travel days you and your team have?

P14: I would say, with the area managers, it has to be flexible because we all have different schedules, and the area managers sometimes leave very early to be on time for appointments. You have to adapt to that. However, I ensure a mix of scheduled appointments, even remotely. I have a weekly team meeting, which is just a small gathering where everyone comes together, and I hold a larger monthly meeting with each person, which we also conduct digitally. A good mix is important. What I've noticed is extremely important, my number one rule in leadership when you have many remote employees or even just remote employees, is truly open communication. Distance can create barriers and sensitivities that creep in without ill intent, and you need to strategically work on eliminating those from time to time.

I: Yes, very interesting. What specific measures do you take to achieve that?

P14: I wouldn't necessarily call it measures, but you can usually tell pretty quickly if someone is in a good mood and if they are positive towards me or not. If I sense something, I address it directly. I confront them openly so that they can't avoid talking about it. Clearing up issues openly is the only thing that helps. Anything else is pointless.

I: Yes, I'll come back to that later when we talk about feedback mechanisms in both directions. But now, regarding general challenges. You already mentioned that there is a greater distance and a bigger barrier in the virtual environment. What are the biggest challenges for you currently in leadership communication with your employees?

P14: Communicating unpleasant things. We are in absolute change management right now, and by "taking people along," I mean repeating, repeating, repeating until it’s almost annoying to them, but still not everyone has understood. Especially in the current times, this is extremely relevant and is becoming increasingly diverse and individual. Some follow immediately because they find it cool and interesting, while others are so rooted in the past, have different strengths, but struggle to embrace this change. You have to take them along too, almost holding their hand. Are you okay? Do you feel comfortable? Slowly bringing them across this bridge. Selling change is difficult because it’s a very personal matter. You really have to adapt to each individual, even more than in normal leadership, I think.

I: Okay, very good point. Do you find that, especially during a change process like Covid, it’s easier to handle things in person than virtually? To take employees along and guide them through the change process?

P14: Yes, definitely. I currently have an employee who is struggling and needs a lot of guidance. It's always difficult until we meet again. The first 30 to 45 minutes are quite tense, but then it eases up through confrontation, and people start to understand. After two days together, suddenly things are cool, and it's understood. I think this has a lot to do with showing appreciation and giving someone your attention.

I: Yes, definitely. Now, about feedback opportunities. Do you feel it’s part of your role as a leader to actively seek feedback? The answer is yes, as you’ve mentioned. But could you elaborate a bit more on that? What is the feedback culture like for you?

P14: I've always felt that I need to initiate this. You have to teach people that it’s okay to give you feedback. Of course, this all needs to happen within a framework and with a sense of proportion, not to protect oneself, but simply because, especially during changes, decisions that are part of corporate strategy are often projected onto a personal level, which can end badly and has no place. But you really have to teach people and keep repeating that you want feedback and that it's okay to provide it. Yes, there is a bigger hurdle. I believe this hurdle is learned. However, I don't notice any difference between generations. Regardless of which generation the person belongs to, giving feedback upward is seen as a big risk, with fears of potential backlash.

I: Yes, yes.

P14: Or also perceived as rude, I believe, especially by people who are a bit more conservative.

I: Yes, definitely. When you receive feedback, do you adjust your communication strategy accordingly based on what your employees communicate?

P14: The classic approach is always standard. First, you say, "Thank you for your feedback. Thank you for trusting me and sharing this with me." That's the first step. Then, you quickly form an opinion about it. But what I like to do is think about it with the other person from my perspective. I discuss the feedback with my employee. Is it valid? Is it something we can change? Is it something we can implement immediately or not at all? This joint reflection is something I've noticed is very much appreciated because it puts us on an equal footing. The employee then feels—and should feel—that it's valuable to discuss this now. This approach rewards the employee by allowing them into the "secret" leadership circle, so to speak, and letting them take part in decision-making.

I: Yes, definitely. Summarizing, what would you say are the biggest challenges of virtual communication with your team?

P14: Consistency is one major challenge. We have our team meeting and then the individual ones, but the fact is, we're not sitting next to each other in the office. Out of sight, out of mind. So, continuously maintaining outreach while everyone is busy with their daily tasks is crucial to keep the connection and share knowledge. This is very important so that no one feels left out. Secondly, maintaining or building the personal level is essential. When working with area managers, for example, I'm new to the team, they've all been there, they don't know me, and I don't know them. You really get to know each other only gradually with each visit. These are the two main challenges I keep working on.

I: Yes, yes, definitely, I understand that well. For the communication among your team, what are the most important tools for you?

P14: For remote communication, the phone is really crucial for me, and I mean speaking, not texting. Then, texting via phone. Secondly, honestly, still emails, and only then video calls. Emails are considered very old-fashioned and not preferred anymore, but I notice that people still work a lot with their inboxes, and if something doesn't land in their inbox, it doesn't happen. These Teams notifications, where you always get a broadcast saying something has been added, they get overlooked because no one really wants to work that way. It doesn't fit into remote leadership. So, distribution via email.

I: Yes, would you say that the technology is still not advanced enough to make virtual work completely efficient?

P14: I don't think so. I find our virtual or remote work to be very efficient by now, so I have no problem with it. I just think that when we're on the phone chatting, I can be wearing jogging pants or not, I can be wearing makeup or not, I can be anywhere I want, and I can put myself in a comfortable situation, so to speak.

I: Yes.

P14: Then I sit down and have a video call with them, and for that, I need at least something decent on top, something that looks relatively smart. The hair shouldn't be all over the place—you know what I mean. It's a much more formal setting, and I think that's why it's easier that way. Secondly, regarding tools for data processing or data transmission, in my opinion, things have advanced almost too far. There was a long period when nothing much happened, and then suddenly everyone was talking about digitalization, buying up everything that was available, and now you have situations where one thing is on the server, another is on Teams SharePoint, the third is somewhere in an email, and no one really knows how. I think maybe people have taken it a step too far, and the speed at which it happened meant that people didn't really understand or establish it properly.

I: Yes, that's a good point. Especially because the variety of tools didn't come with proper implementation, meaning people didn't learn how to use them effectively.

P14: Exactly. It's also important to ask what makes sense for this tool. Or which channel should we agree on for which type of communication?

I: Yes, definitely. A brief question that has come up from my research: Do you think full-time remote work is a model that works in the luxury industry?

P14: No, that's not possible. I don't think it's feasible in the luxury industry. I see that for positions where it might be possible, there's a trend or push to return to the office. I think that's because the luxury industry is very, very conservative. We have old values that we still adhere to. We haven't had much fresh air in this regard. Only now are we slowly starting to see a bit of a change in management, with long-established people leaving or being let go and new ones coming in. But that's happening very slowly.

I: Yes.

P14: There's also an attempt to hold on to an old world. I believe—and this is an aside from my side—that this is a huge problem with the new generation and why we struggle so much with recruiting. Because it's very different here. If you want a job, there's a lot to be gained in the entire industry, but it's simply not that attractive. As mentioned, you can have one home office day free, a second one you'd need to get my approval for, and a third one doesn't exist. Yes. It's very rigid.

I: Yes, yes. I find that interesting.

P14: And I think that's also because we have very little diversity in the industry. Because traditionally – speaking specifically about Central Europe, it might be different in other countries but here, in every company, it's traditionally white people, all coming from at least the middle class, everyone has a good standing at home, and everyone has come with the same values. I suspect people would rather choose black over red, let alone anything on the side, right? Yes. That's the pool we come from. The only change now is that there are a few more women and fewer men in leadership positions, but at the end of the day, we've all been raised similarly. And since everyone needs to have a perfect resume, we've all studied the same things at the same universities, and no one has taken a break to, I don't know, do

something else. It’s all very, very homogeneous. None of us have seen anything different. So where is the input supposed to come from? Yes. No one brings any new perspective.

I: Yes, definitely. That also leads to the next point. How do you see the future? How do you think things will develop, especially with regard to leadership communication?

P14: Honestly, I believe the luxury goods industry will be forced to change because otherwise, you simply won’t attract people anymore. I’m 31 years old, don’t get me wrong, but there’s a new generation coming up with very different values. We won’t be able to recruit anyone if we don’t open up. I find it most striking not even in the office, but in sales, because sales is really struggling right now. Even the biggest, most glamorous maisons are struggling to attract people because no one wants to deal with the work models we offer. And this issue extends from sales into the office. It can’t continue like this. It’s simply unsustainable. So, yes, people are trying to stubbornly push through this crisis, which in my opinion didn’t start with Corona in terms of work models but rather post-Corona. Over the past two, three, or four years, you’ve seen that it just doesn’t work this way anymore. Yes. And you still have old management sitting around with their own ideas that they won’t give up easily. But we can get past that. Yes. It won’t work any other way. Changes will have to be made. It’s unfortunate if you don’t realize that you should have done it earlier.

I: And then you have to get the process started, which also doesn’t work overnight. Yes. What do you think, what new leadership skills might become even more important in the future, or which are already significant today for leading a team, and what do you believe will become even more relevant later on?

P14: I believe communication will become even more crucial, not necessarily for me, but for the broader picture. This new way of communicating—engaging with people, asking for their opinions, including those who are much younger or have just joined—it's important not just to gather their opinions but also to act on them and evaluate them. This is very new and definitely not widespread yet. Yes. It will become increasingly important because otherwise, people just won’t tolerate it. It makes an employer or a leader highly unattractive. And then people will just leave. This will be essential and will only become more pronounced. And I think it’s also important to, how should I put this?

P14: To look beyond the usual and approach things with an open mind. Instead of always demonizing startups and dismissing them as mere fun enterprises, it’s useful to orient yourself a bit and see what might be good about them. It doesn’t hurt to consider that. Yes. This is what people expect when they come into a job, because that’s all they hear about. They hear about how things are at Google, at Meta, the big ones. They don’t hear about how it is at Richemont or F&H. Exactly. And that leads to different expectations when you come in.

I: Yes. That was the last question. Thank you so much. Many, many thanks. That was perfect.

P14: I enjoyed it too. Thank you for considering me as a participant.

I: Is there anything else we haven’t discussed that you’d like to add?

P14: No, I think I've covered everything I had in mind.

I: Wonderful, I'll end the recording then.

E.8 Interview 15

Interview: 15
Role: General Manager and Managing Director
Company: LVMH (Moët Hennessy – Louis Vuitton SE)
Industry: Luxury
Duration: 31:04
Date: 30.07.2024

(Welcome and Explanation of Procedure)

I: To start off, could you please tell me your current position, the company you're working for, and your own working model?

P15: Sure. I'm the General Manager and Managing Director of TAG Heuer Central Europe. TAG Heuer is a brand under LVMH, and Central Europe is a cluster covering three countries: Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands. I work in a model where I spend one to two days working from home. This concept is called Smart Work, which is essentially hybrid. Generally, I spend one day per week in the office. The other two days are dedicated to Smart Work, which involves visiting clients, focusing on expansion, developments, and field appointments. This Smart Work was previously known as "Travelers," but for me, it's much more about being smart than just traveling for business. It means being available, regardless of where you are.

I: Yes, okay, very interesting. How many employees do you manage overall?

P15: I have around 60 employees, two-thirds of whom work in retail, in our own stores. The rest are in staff functions like marketing, HR, customer operations, customer service, finance, and so on, including customer support.

I: Okay, great. And how do your employees work? Do they all have different working models, or is there a common pattern or model that's more frequently used?

P15: We have three working models. One model is for those who, due to the nature of their job, have the opportunity to work hybrid. Then we have the retail employees who are in the store five days a week. Lastly, we have the sales managers who either work in the store or the office and spend the remaining one or two days working remotely.

I: Okay, okay. Now, a question that has come up during my research: Do you think full remote work is a model that works well in the luxury industry?

P15: To be honest, I don't believe so. I prefer at least one day where everyone comes together. You could have slots for full remote work—I'll give you an example: project managers in IT who are implementing new global CRM systems. These people have many stakeholders spread across different regions, like China, Portugal, Indonesia, or Brazil. These are roles I could see working well remotely, yes. However, I would only consider full remote work on a time-limited basis, under a fixed contract.

I: Yes, okay, very interesting perspective. Now, generally speaking, what is the importance of communication with your employees in your daily work?

P15: For me, it's extremely important. As the saying goes, "It's all about communication," and 80 percent of it is non-verbal. You have to consider both verbal and non-verbal communication. The tools we use—whether verbal, written, or oral communication—are crucial. In corporate management, communication is one of the top three skills that are expected and are super important to me: communication up, communication down, and transversal communication. These are the three levels, and I would say they are extremely important.

I: Very interesting, especially the different levels of communication you mentioned.

P15: Yes, it's a very important topic. I can add something here: I generally observe that companies that are quite advanced develop a strong sense of inclusive communication. Inclusive means that the words used are inclusive, the times at which we communicate are inclusive, and we try to respect local working hours or send global emails and schedule meetings when people around the world are awake. We try to find time slots between Asia, Europe, the USA, and Australia that work for everyone. This inclusive communication is becoming increasingly important, especially with the various working models and locations. It requires a collaborative communication style, where you aim to be more assertive, ask questions, and interact with empathy, rather than sticking to the top-down communication we're used to.

I: That's a great approach—truly inspiring and innovative. It sounds like you're definitely following a strategic approach when it comes to communication with your employees.

P15: Absolutely. Very strategic, because there are three levels of communication. There's structured, formal, and personal communication. The first is weekly communication about results and goals, which serves as a bit of a business motivational management tool. Then there's more formal monthly or annual communication about milestones on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, or half-year basis. And then there's the third level, the personal day-to-day communication, which is very spontaneous, allowing for more authenticity and the ability to influence indirect aspects that might not be noticed in formal communication.

I: What would you say are the key skills or factors that make leadership communication effective in the categories you just mentioned?

P15: Preparation is a very important skill—analyzing your audience a bit to adapt the words you use. Clarity in communication, and depending on the message, keeping it simple. That's

very important. Present the top three points you want to address, repeat them twice, and rephrase them three times so that the top three points stick in the mind.

I: That's interesting. Would you say that, given the different working models, the things you prioritize in virtual communication differ from those in face-to-face communication? Are there different key factors you focus on?

P15: Absolutely, absolutely. Let's take the two models: virtual communication and face-to-face communication. Face-to-face communication requires much more time. You notice it's a bit slower; you explain more, listen more, and provide more opportunities for a safe space. Virtual communication, on the other hand, is much more direct, a bit dry, but at the same time more cautious because you never know what's being recorded or filmed. Virtual communication remains very efficient and focused, but it loses some of the non-verbal cues.

I: Yes, definitely. So, would you say that virtual communication is a bit more rational and focused on business topics?

P15: Absolutely, and personal connections can be better developed through office communication.

I: Okay, interesting. Regarding communication challenges, do you currently see any challenges in effective communication with your employees across different working models? Do you see more challenges virtually, on-site, or in the combination? How would you assess this?

P15: I see two challenges. The first is that with the different models—virtual and physical—you sometimes get the impression that you're repeating things or forgetting them. This leads to a model of over-communication, where you might have already covered something virtually, but it comes up again in person or in writing. This results in some redundant communication to ensure the message gets through. The second issue is with communication tools, as these have multiplied exponentially in the business world. Ten years ago, you only had a few tools: phone or email, maybe three if you count mail or fax. And these were somewhat time-delayed: a phone call was immediate, email gave you about 12 hours, and with fax or letters, you had a week. The rules were more or less clear. Today, you still have mail, faxes are not gone but used less, you have the phone, emails, and chats—each with different levels because different tools are used. We use Teams, Slack, Zoom, and our internal chat, and then you also have the additional tools we use in business, like Instagram, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp. All of these tools are used daily by all sorts of people.

I: Yes, 100%.

P15: Many communication channels have just come up and been used without necessarily learning how to use them correctly. For example, you shouldn't send a Teams message, then an email, and then something else, only to follow up with a phone call to address the same topic. The issue of training is a good point here—raising awareness among people about which tools to use and for what purpose.

I: Yes, exactly. That's very important. Would you say there are other challenges besides the technological component, which is obviously extremely important?

P15: I think it's both personal and virtual—attention and accessibility. Attention spans have become extremely short, so you have to repeat things three times to ensure that the top three points stick.

I: Okay, that's interesting. Do you give your employees opportunities for feedback?

P15: We have an official feedback session once a year. We try to have a very structured feedback round at the end of our monthly or quarterly meetings, where we clarify what worked and what we should improve. These feedbacks are 360 degrees, not just on behavior but also on organization, content, and so on. We also try to provide very quick, spontaneous feedback at the end of important meetings.

I: Okay. And do you adjust your strategic approach to leadership communication based on the feedback?

P15: Yes, absolutely.

I: Okay. Out of the tools you mentioned, which ones are most commonly used in your team? What are the main tools you use to communicate with your employees?

P15: The main tools are still email, Teams, and WhatsApp.

I: Okay. And a quick question about your weekly meeting on Tuesdays: that's obviously a measure for on-site communication, but do you also have virtual weekly meetings, or do you prefer to meet in person for those discussions?

P15: Yes. So, on Tuesdays, we're all in the office, but we don't necessarily have many structured meetings because we try to hold meetings on Mondays when people are virtual. Since our business model is very dispersed, we have people everywhere, so we try to organize meetings on Mondays.

I: Okay, great. Now, moving on to the final part, which is about future developments and your recommendations: How do you see leadership communication evolving? What are the trends you currently see in communication across different working models?

P15: One trend I've noticed in the past six months is the increasing use of ChatGPT and artificial intelligence. You see more and more that communication is being generated to become even more efficient. There are those who use it as an aid and others who simply copy and paste without making any corrections. The trend is towards more artificial communication, which is definitely trend number one.

I: Yes, I see.

P15: The second trend, which is a bit of a countermovement, is that more organizations are trying to streamline communication channels, saying, okay, no more WhatsApp for business,

only Teams and email, and only at certain times. This is a trend where companies are trying to structure communication with rules, procedures, content, and so on.

I: Structure, yes.

P15: Exactly, structure. And the third trend I see is a strong emphasis on physical meetings.

I: Yes.

P15: It's not like before, where you had to be in the office, everything had to be physical, and you had to be in the office five days a week. But the importance of physical meetings is still recognized. For example, in our leadership team, we've decided to have two hours on Tuesdays where we fully focus—no phones—on topics, people, situations, and perceptions.

I: Those are great points, yes.

P15: Yes, those are the top three trends I see, and I think they will stabilize over the next two years.

I: Okay. And what would you say about the qualities of a leader? Are there skills that you think will become even more important for maintaining effective communication across different levels, both virtually and in person?

P15: For me, flexibility and agility are crucial – adapting quickly to new tools, new generations, and new ways of communicating. This adaptability isn't just about technology but also about embracing new styles.

I: Yes, yes.

P15: Exactly, adaptability, agility, and flexibility. Secondly, I think it's becoming more important to be concise—clear and simple in explaining messages. Clarity and simplicity are key.

I: Yes.

P15: So, being simple and clear remains important.

I: Yes, wonderful. That was the end of the interview. Those were really great points and insights. Is there anything else you'd like to add or something we haven't covered yet?

P15: It was fun, thank you. No, I think we've covered everything.

I: Thank you. I'll stop the recording now.