

Addressing Quiet Quitting Through Shared Leadership:

A Qualitative Study of Generation Z in Hybrid Work Environments

Authors: Felicia Melanie and Jomes Anderson
Master Thesis

Main field of study: Business Administration

Credits: 15 Credits

Semester/year: VT/2025

Supervisor: Edith Andresen

Examiner: Heléne Lundberg

Course code: FÖ007A

Programme: Master of Science in Business Administration, Marketing and
Management

Acknowledgement

Reaching the end of this thesis has been a transformative experience. This has not only contributed to our academic growth but also encouraged us to reflect on what meaningful work and effective leadership truly look like today.

We are incredibly thankful to our supervisor, Edith Andresen, for her thoughtful guidance, constructive feedback and steady support throughout this thesis. Her expertise and encouragement have evidently played a vital role in helping us shape our ideas into a structured and meaningful study.

Moreover, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks to our families, friends, classmates and loved ones who stood by us with encouragement and patience during the highs and lows of this journey. Your belief in us has been a constant source of motivation.

To the participants who contributed their time and perspectives to our study, we are likewise sincerely grateful. It was truly interesting and insightful to hear the variety of experiences and viewpoints you shared. Your input not only made this study possible but also added real-world depth that we hope will inspire future research.

Finally, we acknowledge the effort and commitment we've poured into this work. It also highlighted the importance of clear communication, mutual accountability and balancing individual responsibilities with shared goals. Completing this Master's thesis marks a proud milestone in our academic journey and we move forward with a sense of growth, gratitude and readiness for the next chapter.

Sundsvall, 16th June 2025

Felicia Melanie
Feme2400@student.miun.se

Jomes Anderson
Joan2409@student.miun.se

Abstract

In an era of evolving work arrangements and shifting generational values, the phenomenon of “quiet quitting,” a subtle form of employee disengagement, has emerged as a growing concern for organizations operating in hybrid work environments. This study explores how shared leadership, as opposed to traditional hierarchical models, influences quiet quitting among Generation Z employees (born 1997-2012). It also examines how early signs of disengagement can be identified and mitigated through shared leadership practices. To address these questions, a qualitative approach was employed, combining 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with both employers and Generation Z employees, along with an exploratory online survey of 32 Generation Z respondents across multiple countries. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover recurring patterns and connect them to the study’s theoretical framework. The findings suggest that among the participants used for this study, shared leadership aligns more closely with Generation Z employees’ preferences for collaboration, flexibility and meaningful work compared to conventional leadership styles. Furthermore, early signs of disengagement, such as passive participation, reduced initiative and digital silence, were more effectively addressed in teams that fostered inclusive communication and encouraged active contributions. As such, these insights offer practical guidance for leaders and Human Resource professionals aiming to sustain engagement among Generation Z employees through participatory leadership strategies adapted to hybrid work contexts.

KEYWORDS: *Shared Leadership, Quiet Quitting, Generation Z, Hybrid Work, Employee Engagement, Motivation, Leadership Styles.*

Key Concepts

ABS Guide - Refers to the Academic Journal Guide published by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (ABS), ranking academic journals from 1 to 4 based on quality, with 4 being the highest.

Collaboration - The process of working together effectively toward shared goals, often involving communication, cooperation and mutual respect.

Employee Engagement - The emotional investment and active participation an individual demonstrates toward their organization and its objectives, often resulting in enhanced job performance.

Generation Z - Individuals born between 1997 and 2012 who are typically recognized for being digital-savvy as well as for their strong social consciousness and emphasis on maintaining work-life balance.

Generational Work Theory - A theory that explores how various generations (e.g., Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z) behave and interact in the workplace.

Herzberg's Two Factor Theory - A motivational framework that categorizes workplace elements into hygiene factors which avert dissatisfaction and motivators, which boost job satisfaction and performance.

Job Demands-Resources Model - A model suggesting that excessive job demands can lead to burnout, while the presence of job resources such as support and autonomy can foster greater engagement and motivation among employees.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory - A theory describing how leaders form unique relationships with each team member, which can affect job satisfaction and performance.

McGregor's Theory X and Y - A management dual-theory perspective on employee motivation; Theory X views workers as inherently disliking work and requiring strict supervision, whereas Theory Y sees them as inherently driven and capable of self-direction.

Motivation Factors - Elements that encourage individuals to perform better, such as achievement, recognition, responsibility and personal growth.

Quiet Quitting - A trend where employees do the bare minimum at work rather than going above and beyond, often due to disengagement or poor management.

Recognition - The practice of acknowledging and valuing employees' contributions and accomplishments, which serves to enhance morale, motivation and organizational commitment.

Shared Leadership - A leadership approach where multiple members of a team share responsibility and decision-making to leverage diverse strengths.

Social Exchange Theory - A theory proposing that human interactions are guided by the evaluation of potential rewards and costs, with individuals seeking to maximize personal benefit within relationships.

Social Learning Theory - A behavioral framework asserting that individuals acquire new behaviors by observing and imitating others, particularly within social and organizational settings.

Team-Member Exchange Theory - Focuses on the quality of relationships between team members and how those relationships affect individual and team outcomes.

Traditional Leadership - A leadership model characterized by centralized authority, a clear chain of command and decision-making processes that flow from the top down within a structured hierarchy.

Trust - The belief in the reliability, integrity and competence of others.

Contents

Acknowledgement	2
Abstract	3
Key Concepts	4
Contents	6
1. Introduction	9
1.1 Research purpose	13
1.2 Research question	13
2. Theoretical framework.....	14
2.1 Enhancing team dynamics through shared leadership	14
2.1.1 Shared Leadership theory	14
2.1.2 Trust and Social Exchange Theory.....	15
2.2 Leadership and engagement in a hybrid work context	16
2.2.1 The Role of Leader-Member Exchange	17
2.2.2 Comparing Leadership Approaches.....	18
2.3 Exploring Generation Z's Workplace Preferences and Leadership Expectations	19
2.3.1 Generational Traits and Work Values of Generation Z.....	19
2.3.2 Generational Work Theory	20
2.3.3 Herzberg's Two-Factor theory and Generation Z Motivation	22
2.4 Identifying and Addressing Quiet Quitting in Hybrid Work Environments	24
2.4.1 Disengagement Through the Job Demands-Resources Model.....	25
2.4.2 Leadership Mindsets Through McGregor's Theory X and Y	26
3. Analytical Model.....	26
4. Methods	27
4.1 Research Approach	28
4.2 Data Collection Process	29
4.2.1 Literature Study.....	29
4.2.2 Primary Data Collection	30

4.3 Sample Population	36
4.3.1 Semi-Structured Interview	36
4.3.2 Online survey	37
4.4 Data Analysis Extraction Process.....	39
4.4.1 Data Coding and Analytical Process	39
4.5 Quality Standards.....	40
4.5.1 Credibility	40
4.5.2 Transferability	41
4.6 Research Limitations	42
4.7 Ethical Consideration	43
4.8 Impact on Society.....	44
5. Analysis	45
5.1 Understanding Leadership Dynamics in the Workplace.....	45
5.1.1 Employers Leadership Style	46
5.1.2 Employees' Experience on their Manager's Leadership Style	50
5.2 Communication in Hybrid Work.....	55
5.2.1 Practical Communication Strategies and Challenges in Hybrid Teams	55
5.2.2 Responsiveness, Leadership Accessibility and Workflow	58
5.3 Motivation and Engagement of Generation Z	62
5.3.1 Observing Changes in Employee Attitude	62
5.3.2 Addressing Engagement through Leadership	64
5.3.3 Reflections on Engagement at Work	65
5.4 Trust in Hybrid Teams	67
5.4.1 Employer's Perspectives on Trust Challenges and Experiences	68
5.4.2 Employee's Perspectives on Trust Challenges and Experiences.....	70
6. Discussion.....	73
6.1 Understanding Generation Z	73
6.2 Collaboration	74

6.3 Autonomy	74
6.4 Trust.....	75
6.5 Recognition.....	75
6.6 Employee Engagement	76
7. Conclusion	77
7.1 Suggestions for Future Research	79
7.2 Managerial Implications.....	80
8. References	83
9. Appendix	88
9.1 Literature study Journal’s ABS 2024 ranking	88
9.2 Online Survey Instruction and Questionnaire.....	90
9.3 Semi-Structured Interview Instruction	96
9.3.1 Interview Guide: Employers.....	97
9.3.2 Interview Guide: Employees	99

1. Introduction

Workplace dynamics have shifted dramatically in recent years due to rapid technological advancements, evolving generational values and the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The onset of global lockdowns and physical distancing mandates forced organizations to transition almost overnight to remote work arrangements (Formica and Sfodera, 2022; Georgiadou et al., 2025; Plester and Lloyd, 2024). Remote work, as defined by Kim and Kim (2024), enables employees to perform their duties outside conventional office environments, typically from home, while relying on digital platforms to maintain productivity and connectivity. Tools like Zoom exemplify the digital infrastructure supporting this shift, facilitating virtual collaboration among team members (Buła et al., 2024).

Initially seen as a temporary measure during an unprecedented crisis, remote work soon demonstrated its broader potential. In addition to maintaining operations during lockdowns, Boyraz and Gilbert (2024) noted practical advantages such as reduced commuting time and lower daily expenses, which contributed to greater productivity, enhanced job satisfaction and a more satisfying work-life balance. Consequently, remote work transitioned from an emergency response to a widely adopted organizational strategy, supported by the increasing use of digital communication and collaboration tools (Boyraz and Gilbert 2024; Buła et al. 2024; Fernández et al. 2023; Formica and Sfodera 2022; Plester and Lloyd 2024; Kim and Kim 2024).

However, as public health restrictions relaxed and office spaces reopened, many employers urged their teams to return to traditional workplaces. Yet for a large segment of the workforce, remote work has become more than a temporary adaptation. Based on a 2022 Pew Research Center survey cited by Boyraz and Gilbert (2024), 61% of respondents with access to a physical office had chosen not to return even two years into the pandemic. This resistance reflected a broader transformation in work expectations. According to Buła et al. (2024), Formica and Sfodera (2022) and Khatri et al. (2023), that marked the beginning of a new standard in workplace organization. That standard is the hybrid work model which blends remote and on-site work, giving employees greater flexibility in choosing where and how they carry out their responsibilities. Luring and Jonasson (2025) further explain that hybrid work differs from fully remote work in that it emphasizes a combination of both in-office and remote settings, allowing individuals to alternate between various work environments.

Building on the advantages experienced during the remote work phase, the hybrid model has emerged as a more balanced approach to modern work. Plester and Lloyd (2024) and Buła et al. (2024) argue that this shift has fundamentally altered employee expectations, with flexibility becoming an anticipated norm. Khatri et al. (2023) even add that such adaptability not only enhances individual well-being but also promotes organizational performance.

Additionally, younger generations, especially Generation Zs (born 1997-2012), are at the forefront of this shift and are actively reshaping workplace expectations. Growing up with constant access to technology and digital platforms, they are often described as digital natives (Sun 2024). Furthermore, Ita (2025) further explains that Generation Z employees prioritize

authenticity, mental health and purpose-driven work, often seeking employment that aligns with their beliefs and expectations for flexibility. This is best understood through Generational Work Theory as it highlights their focus on autonomy, purpose and balance (Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Fuchs et al., 2024).

However, despite its benefits, hybrid work presents challenges as well. Boyraz and Gilbert (2024) point to several contributing factors, including the pressure of constant availability, unreliable internet access, social isolation, limited prospects for professional growth, as well as the overlapping boundaries between professional responsibilities at work and personal life. Some of these challenges are echoed by Team-Member Exchange Theory, which emphasizes the quality of peer-to-peer relationships within teams, suggesting that limited interpersonal exchanges in hybrid teams can weaken trust, making it even harder for employees to feel a sense of support and connection with their coworkers (Ge et al., 2024).

In response to these ongoing tensions, the idea of “quiet quitting” has garnered widespread attention across social media platforms (Harris, 2024; Liu-Lastres et al., 2023). According to Formica and Sfodera (2022), this term was originally introduced by economist Mark Boldger in 2009, though it remained relatively unknown for years. Subsequently, its resurgence in 2022 was triggered by a viral TikTok video, generating over 1.2 million monthly searches by August of that year (Agarwal et al., 2024). Contrary to what the term may imply, “quiet quitting” does not involve leaving a job. Rather, as Karrani et al. (2023) and Liu-Lastres et al. (2023) explain, it refers to a conscious decision by employees to intentionally limit their efforts to only those required by their job descriptions. Corbin and Flenady (2024) describe this mindset as doing the bare minimum required, while Georgiadou et al. (2025) further suggest that this behavior reflects a deliberate redefinition of the employee’s relationship with work, such as one that emphasizes clear personal boundaries and a withdrawal of discretionary effort.

This growing preference for boundaries in the workplace did not emerge in isolation as the COVID-19 pandemic has played a significant role in accelerating the momentum behind this trend. As workers faced unprecedented disruptions, many began to prioritize mental health, family obligations and personal development (Agarwal et al., 2024; Formica and Sfodera, 2022; Georgiadou et al., 2025; Jasmine and Utomo, 2024). According to these authors, when employees feel undervalued or experience misalignment with organizational values, quiet quitting may emerge as a coping mechanism. Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory is particularly relevant here as it distinguishes between hygiene factors like salary and policies as well as motivator factors like recognition and growth. Both elements are essential for job satisfaction and when any of these motivating elements are insufficient or lacking, employees may still feel dissatisfied with their work and disengage from their roles (Daniels, 2023; Zhou and Ma, 2024). However, as Karrani et al. (2023) note, while some employees may consider leaving their roles entirely, uncertainty in the labor market often leads them to remain in place while quietly disengaging through ‘quiet quitting’.

The consequences of this disengagement extend beyond individual job satisfaction and personal boundaries as they are now reflected in broader organizational and economic outcomes. For

example, according to Gallup's 2023 report, nearly 60% of the global workforce is not fully engaged, costing the global economy estimated losses reaching 8.8 trillion dollars annually or approximately 9% of the global economy (Karrani et al., 2023). Notably, Generation Z is a major contributor to this trend. Moreover, a poll by Axios cited in Liu-Lastres et al. (2023) found that 85% of Generation Z workers find quiet quitting appealing and that 15% of them have already embraced this mindset.

Likewise, this shift is also evident in the evolving relationship between younger employees and their managers. Gallup further reports that younger employees feel less supported and face fewer development opportunities than previous cohorts, largely due to the reduced interpersonal connectivity in hybrid settings (Formica and Sfodera, 2022; Harter, 2022). Liu-Lastres et al. (2023) echo this, noting that many workplaces once seen as collaborative and engaging have become increasingly isolating for employees. Ironically, this disengagement often escapes the attention of managers until it starts to impact team dynamics and overall performance. Georgiadou et al. (2025) warn that these disengagement patterns can spread quietly, eroding morale and productivity. Similarly, Harris (2024) further argues that this signals a reflection of deeper organizational structural issues that have been intensified by post-pandemic shifts in work culture. This can be understood through Social Exchange Theory, which Kim and Kim (2024) suggest that when employees perceive an imbalance between effort and reward, they may withdraw in response.

To counteract this disengagement, leadership must evolve. Jasmine and Utomo (2024) stress that understanding the unique expectations of younger workers is key to sustaining motivation. Agarwal et al. (2024) further argue that effective leadership today must go beyond simply monitoring performance. Instead, leaders should prioritize both the personal and professional well-being of their teams to foster resilience, strengthen motivation and cultivate a deeper sense of purpose in the workplace.

One promising approach to addressing these challenges is the adoption of shared leadership. Jasmine and Utomo (2024) highlight this model as particularly effective in dynamic and hybrid work environments, where individual visibility and traditional oversight can be limited. Shared leadership distributes responsibility among team members, promoting mutual accountability, inclusive decision-making and a stronger sense of collective ownership. By embracing diverse perspectives and encouraging collaboration, this approach not only enhances team cohesion but also ensures that each member's unique strengths are utilized (Ji et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2025; Mansoor et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2024).

Although recent studies have connected quiet quitting to employee disengagement, burnout and unmet psychological needs, there has been limited exploration of leadership strategies that proactively address the expectations of Generation Z employees (Awwad et al., 2022; Formica and Sfodera, 2022). Among these underlying factors, burnout is especially significant. Choudhury and Maupin (2025) characterized burnout as a state of emotional, mental and physical fatigue that is caused by extended stress in the workplace and a lack of adequate leadership support. This issue is particularly well framed by the Job Demands-Resources model

which examines how high demands and limited workplace resources can create psychological strain and contribute to disengagement (Awwad et al., 2022; Choudhury and Maupin, 2025; Katou et al., 2021).

Moreover, the need for effective intervention is becoming more urgent due to the increasing visibility of quiet quitting on social media, where it is often portrayed as a legitimate and even empowering response to rigid workplace norms. Furthermore, as these narratives gain popularity, there is concern that the behavior may become more widespread, with lasting effects on organizational performance and team dynamics (Agarwal et al., 2024; Harris, 2024; Liu-Lastres et al., 2023).

At the same time, the growing presence of Generation Z in the workforce is introducing new challenges to traditional leadership models as well. This generation, according to Ita (2025), is expected to represent nearly 30% of the global labor force in the coming years. As mentioned earlier, previous research indicates that Generation Z places strong value on authenticity, flexibility and autonomy which are principles that often conflict with conventional leadership structures (Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Boyraz and Gilbert, 2024). As such, when these values are not recognized or supported, authors Georgiadou et al. (2025) argue that members of this generation may disengage in subtle ways, often continuing to fulfill only the minimum job requirements without openly expressing dissatisfaction.

This is particularly concerning because these dynamics are even more pronounced in hybrid work environments. Buła et al. (2024) cite that the lack of regular face-to-face interaction, along with reduced visibility and inconsistent feedback, can make it difficult for leaders to detect early signs of disengagement before they escalate. In such contexts, formal, traditional top-down leadership styles may fall short. According to authors Lu et al. (2024) and Tang et al. (2023), this aligns with the principles of Leader-Member Exchange Theory, which highlights the importance of building quality relationships between leaders and individual team members. When these relationships are weak, disengagement is likely to occur. Furthermore, studies have even shown that Generation Z employees are more responsive to inclusive, transparent and collaborative leadership approaches that foster mutual trust and involvement (Boyraz and Gilbert, 2024; Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Leslie et al., 2021).

Ultimately, leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering engagement and minimizing turnover (Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Ge et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). However, many existing leadership frameworks remain grounded in hierarchical or individually centered models, limiting autonomy and innovation, especially in flexible work settings (Mansoor et al., 2025; Ziegert and Dust, 2020). As Ali et al. (2025) note, such structures often hinder participation. In contrast, shared leadership, where control and decision-making are spread more equally among team members, has shown promise in enhancing collaboration, accountability and belonging. This distinction aligns closely with McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, which contrasts managerial assumptions: Theory X assumes employees must be controlled while Theory Y emphasizes intrinsic motivation and autonomy, which are values that resonate more with Generation Zs (Bakoula and Galanakis, 2022).

Moreover, Georgiadou et al. (2025) also warn that rigid leadership structures may unintentionally contribute to disengagement, especially within rapidly evolving or digitally mediated environments. Social Learning Theory offers valuable perspectives in this case, highlighting how employees, especially younger generations, model the behaviors observed in their leaders and peers. According to authors Ziegert and Dust (2020), when leadership demonstrates flexibility, authenticity and collaborative engagement, employees tend to mirror these traits, fostering a culture of openness and motivation. This underlines the importance of visible, value aligned leadership in shaping employee attitudes towards work. However, the potential of shared leadership in addressing quiet quitting among Generation Z employees in hybrid environments still remains underexplored. (Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Zhou and Ma, 2024).

Given these growing concerns, this topic was chosen because we are motivated to explore quiet quitting not merely as a passing trend in a workplace, but also as a sign of deeper reflection between leadership practices and the evolving expectations of a Generation Z employee. By focusing on shared leadership as a flexible and inclusive approach, this study seeks to provide insights that may support more sustainable and responsive leadership development in the future, aiming to contribute valuable insights for further research and leadership development.

1.1 Research purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how shared leadership influences quiet quitting among Generation Z employees within hybrid work environments. Specifically, the study will explore the extent to which shared leadership practices can mitigate disengagement and promote motivation among Generation Z employees, who are increasingly shaping the modern workforce. In addition, this study seeks to identify how early signs of quiet quitting can be detected and addressed through inclusive and collaborative leadership approaches. By focusing on this intersection of leadership style, generational expectations and hybrid work structures, the study intends to contribute actionable insights and contributions for organizational leaders and human resource professionals. The ultimate goal is to support the development of leadership strategies that foster engagement, retention and long-term organizational resilience in the evolving world of work.

1.2 Research question

The following questions that would guide the thesis are:

1. How does shared leadership, in comparison to traditional leadership, influence quiet quitting among Generation Z employees in hybrid work environments?
2. How can early signs of quiet quitting be detected and prevented through shared leadership practices to sustain employee engagement?

2. Theoretical framework

This section presents the literature study underpinning the study of leadership, engagement and quiet quitting among Generation Z employees in hybrid work environments. It examines the influence of leadership on team dynamics and employee motivation, providing a lens to understand the factors that facilitate and/or hinder engagement in modern workplaces.

2.1 Enhancing team dynamics through shared leadership

By exploring both the benefits and challenges of shared leadership, this section highlights its potential to foster stronger team cohesion and long-term effectiveness. In addition, this section also examines how shared leadership enhances team collaboration, accountability and trust by drawing on Shared Leadership Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Leader-Member Exchange and Team-Member Exchange theories.

2.1.1 Shared Leadership theory

Shared leadership theory challenges the traditional model of formal, top-down authority by advocating a more distributed form of influence. In this framework, leadership does not reside in a single individual leader but emerges from the combined expertise and evolving contributions of team members (Ali et al., 2025; Mansoor et al., 2025; Kim and Kim, 2024). This collective approach encourages individuals to engage actively in decision-making, shape goals and guide the team's direction. As Zhang et al. (2024) explain, one of the core strengths of shared leadership lies in its ability to break down rigid leadership roles, allowing members to fluidly step into leadership positions based on their strengths and the needs of the moment. This flexibility supports a more dynamic and collaborative team environment while addressing the limitations often associated with hierarchical leadership.

A central condition for shared leadership to function effectively is the empowerment of individuals within the team as by encouraging initiative and granting autonomy, leaders foster a culture built on trust, mutual respect and accountability (Ali and Yushi, 2024; Klasmeier et al., 2025). Zhou et al. (2024) further note that such an environment enables members to influence one another in constructive ways, strengthening team cohesion and performance. Furthermore, when this approach is applied in virtual teams, it broadens the range of perspectives and helps avoid narrow or uninformed decisions, which ultimately enhances adaptability. As Mansoor et al. (2025) describe, this model allows empowered teams to draw from their collective knowledge to navigate complex challenges and respond effectively to rapid changes. When members recognize that they have the authority to make decisions and contribute meaningfully, shared leadership becomes a more powerful and inclusive process.

However, tensions may arise when formal leaders perceive shared influence as a threat and challenge to their authority. According to Klasmeier et al. (2025), such conflicts are often rooted in fears of losing control, especially when team members assert leadership in areas traditionally managed by appointed leaders. Drawing on adaptive leadership theory, the authors further argue that leadership should be seen as a co-created, negotiated process that evolves through mutual

recognition of leadership and followership instead. Moreover, role ambiguity can lead to power struggles too, particularly in teams where expertise overlaps or boundaries are unclear. Ji et al. (2024) observe that these dynamics may result in competition for influence, sometimes escalating into behaviors like coercion, undermining or interpersonal conflict. In addition, when influence is unequally distributed, transitions in leadership may be perceived as illegitimate, undermining collaboration (Mansoor et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, functional diversity can ease these challenges. Choudhury and Maupin (2025) emphasize that depending on the nature of the task and the distribution of expertise, competencies and strengths within the team, multiple individuals may adopt leadership roles either concurrently or at different stages. This leadership flexibility reinforces the idea as a shared team property, rather than a fixed role. Ji et al. (2024) and Ziegert and Dust (2020) also point out that it helps prevent dominance by a single viewpoint, promoting diverse input and open information exchange. As a result, teams better leverage each member's expertise and foster mutual influence. Furthermore, shared leadership has been identified as an effective approach in dynamic work settings, where adaptability and collaboration are essential for success (Jasmine and Utomo, 2024). Additionally, according to Klasmeier et al. (2025), leadership in such settings becomes a collective responsibility, with both formal leaders and team members working together to achieve shared objectives. This growing recognition highlights the increasing importance of fostering inclusive leadership practices within modern organizations.

2.1.2 Trust and Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory provides a valuable lens for examining the relational dynamics that underpin shared leadership. By highlighting the importance of trust, mutual respect and a sense of obligation, the theory helps explain how strong, collaborative team environments emerge and are maintained. For instance, when individuals perceive their contributions as valued and see themselves as active participants in decision-making processes, they are more likely to take initiative, embrace responsibility and demonstrate leadership behaviors aligned with collective goals (Abson et al., 2024; Kim and Kim, 2024; Mansoor et al., 2025).

For instance, within this Social Exchange theoretical framework, Kim and Kim (2024) emphasize that the exchanges within teams are often grounded in emotional and social connections rather than material rewards. These interactions manifest as loyalty, psychological support and sustained commitment which form the emotional backbone of shared leadership. Leadership behaviors, therefore, are not viewed as transactional but rather as expressions of ongoing interpersonal obligations. When members feel supported or acknowledged, they naturally reciprocate, fostering a continuous cycle of mutual influence that reinforces the shared leadership model. Extending on these relational perspectives, Abson et al. (2024) describe shared leadership as an adaptable and evolving process where influence shifts fluidly among members based on the situation. As trust grows through familiarity and proven reliability, the quality of social exchanges improves, becoming both a product and a driver of shared leadership. Further supporting this view, Mansoor et al. (2025) explain that when team members feel empowered in decision-making, they experience a stronger sense of value and belonging. This perceived empowerment motivates them to take initiative, uphold responsibilities and contribute more

actively to team leadership, strengthening both individual accountability and overall team engagement.

The significance of shared leadership becomes even more pronounced in work environments where in-person interactions are limited. While flexible work settings may reduce stress, they can also lead to a sense of disconnection, which can indirectly impact employees' work performance negatively (Buła et al., 2024; Luring and Jonasson, 2025). As a result, shared leadership helps bridge the gap by maintaining consistent communication, fostering peer support and reinforcing social ties within the team. This ongoing engagement is essential for preserving cohesion and collaboration in virtual environments (Ali and Yushi, 2024; Kim and Kim, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024; Ziegert and Dust, 2020).

2.1.2.1 Contributions of Team-Member Exchange

In decentralized or virtual team settings, Team-Member Exchange offers a complementary mechanism for strengthening team dynamics as well. With fewer impromptu interactions, Team-Member Exchange ensures that communication remains intentional and purposeful, as highlighted by Ge et al., (2024). For instance, the authors argue that high-quality Team-Member Exchange emphasizes the development of strong interpersonal connections and mutual trust where team members participate actively, take on shared responsibilities and contribute to the team's collective goals. Grounded in social exchange theory, this process of exchange is a fundamental mechanism for establishing interactive relationships within teams, acting as the factor of motivation that drives shared leadership.

Importantly, the quality of trust and Team-Member Exchange also influences the manner in which formal leaders navigate and respond to emerging leadership within their teams. Klasmeier et al. (2025) note that leaders are more likely to delegate authority when they trust their teams and see constructive engagement in shared leadership. Empowering leadership, in this context, involves deliberate decisions about granting autonomy based on trust and team dynamics. However, when team members fail to reciprocate or contribute meaningfully, leaders may hesitate to share control, disrupting the balance of social exchange and stalling the development of shared leadership. As Ge et al. (2024) point out as well, low-quality Team-Member Exchange in such environments can also discourage initiative, reduce openness to peer input and undermine both individual development and overall team effectiveness.

2.2 Leadership and engagement in a hybrid work context

By examining how leadership styles influence employee engagement, this section highlights the critical role of leader-employee relationships in shaping motivation, trust and performance. In particular, it compares formal, traditional top-down leadership with shared leadership, drawing on Leader-Member Exchange Theory, Social Learning Theory and perspectives on inclusive leadership.

2.2.1 The Role of Leader-Member Exchange

Leader-Member Exchange theory highlights the significance of the individualized relationships that form between leaders and their employees. According to this theory, authors Lu et al. (2024) highlight that leaders do not treat all team members identically. Instead, they develop varying levels of relationships, which are broadly classified as either high-quality or low-quality exchanges. Moreover, since leaders often act as role models in defining what is considered proper and expected behavior, they naturally become central figures in shaping how team members learn and adapt socially (Ziegert and Dust, 2020). This highlights that the quality of the leader-member relationship extends beyond individual outcomes.

As such, the distinction between high- and low-quality exchanges becomes even more evident when considering the characteristics of these relationships. In high-quality Leader-Member Exchange interactions, both parties trust, respect and support one another all the time. In such relationships, employees are highly motivated to preserve the strong bond they share with their leaders. This desire to uphold a favorable relationship may drive them to go to great lengths to meet or exceed expectations, sometimes even to the point of compromising moral standards in order to avoid disappointing their leaders. In contrast, low-quality Leader-Member Exchange is typically more transactional and impersonal, characterized by minimal emotional engagement and a lack of shared resources. Employees in these relationships often feel disconnected and unsupported. In addition, when faced with performance demands, they may still experience fear of underperformance but lack the motivation to contribute beyond the bare minimum. A possible reason might be that they do not perceive a meaningful relationship with their leaders or the organization (Lu et al., 2024; Tang et al., 2023).

Expanding on the importance of high-quality leader-member relationships, Jasmine and Utomo (2024) highlight that in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, leadership has become more crucial than ever as employees increasingly look for leaders who demonstrate not only sound decision-making abilities but also trustworthiness and a capacity to nurture mutual understanding within teams. In this context, the quality of leader-member relationships takes on even greater significance. Lu et al. (2024) argue that Meta-analytic research consistently demonstrates that high-quality Leader-Member Exchange is linked to positive organizational outcomes such as enhanced job satisfaction and better performance. These findings reinforce the value of nurturing high-quality Leader-Member Exchange as a critical component of effective organizational success.

Further contributing to the understanding of leadership behaviors that promote high-quality Leader-Member Exchange, Georgiadou et al. (2025) also emphasize the role of inclusive leadership. Inclusive leaders embrace individual differences, enhance a sense of belonging and show genuine appreciation for their employees. By empowering team members, offering a shared sense of purpose, cultivating a trustworthy and collaborative workplace atmosphere, inclusive leadership strengthens the foundation for high-quality leader-member relationships. As a result, it not only enhances interpersonal dynamics but also provides a more cohesive and productive workplace environment.

2.2.2 Comparing Leadership Approaches

According to Ali et al. (2025), the key difference between shared leadership and formal, traditional top-down leadership lies in how influence is exercised within a team. In formal, traditional top-down leadership models, authority is centralized in a single individual who is a leader formally appointed to guide, motivate and steer the team toward specific objectives.

Within such traditional frameworks, this centralization of authority means that the team leader assumes a pivotal role in all aspects of team dynamics. The leader acts as the primary point of contact for managing people, balancing the dual role of overseeing the team as a whole while also addressing the needs of individual members. Thus, leading by example becomes a crucial and impactful method of guiding others (Fernández et al., 2023). Zhou et al. (2024) further supports this understanding by noting that formal leaders rely heavily on vertical, top-down interaction, where the leader acts as the central authority figure, directing actions and making decisions for the group.

The hierarchical and centralized structure is further reinforced through the Social Learning Theory, as discussed by Ziegert and Dust (2020), which explains that individuals in formal leadership roles are more likely to display dominant leadership behaviors. As a result, team members without formal titles may become passive observers, contributing less actively to discussions and decision-making processes. Moreover, while this model offers clear direction, especially in scenarios where swift decision-making is critical, it can also lead to unintended consequences. For example, the authors highlight that one advantage of formal leadership is its ability to break decision-making deadlocks and reorient the team during conflicts. However, this authoritative approach may suppress participation, discouraging team members from expressing dissent or contributing to innovative ideas.

Additionally, Georgiadou et al. (2025) note the downsides of overly hierarchical structures, particularly micromanagement, which often stems from distrust as well as rigid monitoring and control. This often results in decreased motivation, engagement and creative output which may even lead to subtle forms of withdrawal like quiet quitting. The authors cite that such patterns are especially common in managerial cultures that emphasize strict oversight, like those traditionally seen in Greek organizations. Moreover, another key contribution driving these outcomes is limited job control. For example, when employees lack autonomy, their sense of ownership and motivation decline, ultimately increasing stress and lowering performance. With that being said, micromanagers also often rely on transactional leadership, using incentives and consequences for their employees. Though this may secure immediate compliance, it generally fails to build the internal motivation needed for lasting and sustainable engagement.

In contrast to traditional models, shared leadership distributes influence among several team members, fostering a more collaborative and adaptable approach (Ali et al., 2025). As Klasmeier et al. (2025) point out, leadership and followership are socially constructed roles that evolve through interaction and context, challenging the idea that authority must reside in a single individual. Supporting this view, Abson et al. (2024) also argue that multiple leadership styles can coexist and complement one another within organizations, enhancing flexibility and

inclusivity. The authors emphasize shared leadership, in this context, allows influence to be distributed not only from the top down but also laterally among team members. This approach expands the team's collective expertise, strengthens decision-making processes and encourages the exchange of knowledge across the organization.

2.3 Exploring Generation Z's Workplace Preferences and Leadership Expectations

As Generation Z increasingly enters the workforce, their unique preferences and values are reshaping how organizations approach leadership. Thus, this section draws on Generational Work Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory to delve into the expectations of Generation Zs in the workplace and the implications these have for contemporary leadership practices.

2.3.1 Generational Traits and Work Values of Generation Z

Generation Z represents the first digitally-native generation to enter the workforce, having grown up with technology as an integral part of their daily lives (McKinsey and Company, 2024). In contrast to millennials who paved the way in the digital age, Generation Z grew up within it. As Jasmine and Utomo (2024) emphasize, Generation Z navigates a world shaped by algorithms, multiple identities, virtual communication and social platforms that prioritize authenticity, activism and immediacy.

However, unlike previous generations who traditionally focused on job security and a linear career path, Generation Z approaches the job market with a different set of expectations shaped by their unique socio-economic and technological influence. Instead, they value flexibility and autonomy with a demanding expectation of a participatory role in organizational policies, particularly those that relate to remote work (Boyraz and Gilbert, 2024; Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Leslie et al., 2021).

Additionally, Leslie et al., (2021) argue that Generation Zs are more comfortable with flat organizational structures and peer collaboration. Unlike the older generations, this cohort demonstrates a lower tolerance for unfavorable working conditions, a greater willingness to question authority and a stronger inclination to advocate for social change (Georgiadou et al., 2025). This reflects a broader generational shift in expectations, particularly regarding leadership that prioritizes work-life balance and autonomy. In workplaces where these expectations are not met, the risk of disengagement manifests through trends like quiet quitting (Formica and Sfodera, 2022; Georgiadou et al., 2025; Karrani et al., 2023).

For Generation Z, work extends beyond a paycheck but is also viewed as a source of meaning and purpose. According to Jasmine and Utomo (2024), this shift in workplace values is not purely ideological. Rather, it reflects the impact of key formative experiences, particularly the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For many in this generation, their entry into the workforce coincided with widespread layoffs, social isolation and the abrupt transition to virtual and hybrid work. These experiences have heightened their awareness of the importance of work-

life balance and overall well-being. As a result, behaviors such as quiet quitting, where disengagement becomes a coping strategy to manage stress and protect personal health have become increasingly common (Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Kim and Kim, 2024; Wu and Wei, 2024).

Leslie et al. (2021) add to this contribution by revealing three distinct subgroups within this cohort, each exhibiting different motivational drivers and engagement patterns. According to their segmentation, Social Investors, for instance, prioritize work-life balance and are especially drawn to roles that reflect their personal values and contribute to a broader social mission. Chill Worker Bees, on the other hand, place greater emphasis on maintaining a low-stress, supportive work environment that promotes emotional well-being and stability. Finally, Go Getters represent the highly ambitious segment of the cohort, motivated by rapid career advancement, achievement and professional recognition. These differentiated profiles underscore the importance of leadership approaches that go beyond generational stereotypes and instead cater to the complex, evolving identities within Generation Z.

Subsequently, while some scholars praise these Generation Zs for their ambitions and value-driven attitude, others emphasize the complexities and contradictions in their behaviors. For instance, Jasmine and Utomo (2024) describe Generation Zs as possessing a distinct set of workplace expectations and values. Notably, their study reveals that while work-life balance alone does not significantly influence organizational commitment, employee engagement fully mediates this relationship. This difference in Generation Z's approach to work suggests that their workplace preferences are not static but subject to negotiation, as evidenced by their involvement in trends such as quiet quitting and their explicit demands for flexibility, work-life balance and meaningful work (Agarwal et al., 2024; Jasmine and Utomo, 2024).

2.3.2 Generational Work Theory

Generational Work Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how values and behaviors differ across generations in the workplace. Its importance continues to grow as organizations navigate the complexities of managing multiple generations within the same work environment. This section highlights how each generation, beginning from Baby Boomers and Generation X to Millennials and Generation Z, has developed distinct workplace preferences shaped by the economic, technological, and cultural conditions experienced during their formative years (Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Fuchs et al., 2024). Developing a deeper understanding of these differences is essential for creating cohesion within today's multigenerational workforce.

2.3.2.1 Characteristics of Generational Cohorts

As noted by Leslie et al. (2021), generations are groups of individuals born within a particular span of years who tend to share comparable values, collective experiences and cultural influences. Though the exact cutoff years may vary, several widely recognized generational cohorts have emerged over time.

Baby Boomers

The Baby Boomers are those born within (1946-1964), distinguished by their allegiance to organizations, robust work ethic and inclination towards structured environments. Influenced by the post-war economic boom and social stability, they tend to prioritize commitment to stable employment as well as job security (Fuchs et al., 2024; Morris, 2023; Rathi and Kumar, 2023).

Generation X

Generation X is marked as individuals within (1965-1980) and known for their independence and aspiration for work-life balance. Having grown up amidst times of societal change and economic instability, they fostered a realistic attitude and prefer to place importance on freedom and flexibility in their job settings (Fuchs et al., 2024; Negruşa, 2024).

Millennials / Generation Y

Millennials or Generation Y include those born within (1981-1996) who are purpose-oriented, technologically advanced and team-driven. Motivated by fast technological change and globalization, they seek an inclusive workplace that supports their values and provide continues learning opportunities (Fuchs et al., 2024; Sun, 2024).

Generation Z

Born within (1997-2012), Generation Z workers are considered the youngest to enter the workforce and are renowned for their digital proficiency and entrepreneurial spirit. They cherish freedom, autonomy and innovation, with an inclination towards flat management systems and dialogic leadership. Growing up in a society heavily affected by the internet and social media, Generation Z offers a distinct viewpoint to the workplace emphasizing independence and innovation (Sun, 2024).

2.3.2.2 Implications for Leadership and Engagement in Hybrid Workplaces

Understanding generational differences has important implications for employee engagement and leadership, especially in today's hybrid workplaces. Leslie et al. (2021) highlight that when leadership styles do not align with the expectations of different generations, it can lead to disengagement. For instance, Generation Z employees who often prefer inclusive and interactive leadership, may feel disconnected in rigid, hierarchical cultures. In contrast, Baby Boomers may find it challenging to adapt to remote-first or highly autonomous environments where traditional chains of command are less visible (Fuchs et al., 2024).

Notably, shared leadership where decision-making and responsibilities are spread among team members has gained recognition as an effective model, particularly for younger generations, as Kim and Kim (2024) and Zhou et al. (2024) pointed out. This approach aligns well with Generation Z's preferences for autonomy, inclusion and shared responsibility. It is increasingly seen as a vital strategy for boosting engagement and minimizing turnover, especially in hybrid work environments (Fuchs et al., 2024; Leslie et al., 2021).

2.3.2.3 Criticisms and Limitations of Generational Work Theory

Despite its usefulness, Generational Work Theory is not without criticism. According to Negrușă (2024), one major concern is the risk of overgeneralization as individuals within the same generational cohort may have diverse experiences, values and expectations. Factors such as individual upbringing, cultural context and career stage can largely influence attitudes towards work, making generational labels overly simplistic.

Additionally, authors (Costanza et al., 2023) argue that methodological limitations such as the use of indiscriminate year of birth cut-offs and retrospective assumptions about generational traits challenge the theory's reliability and predictive power. As a result, scholars caution that while generational frameworks offer helpful insights, they should be applied with care and complemented by context-specific understanding (Fuchs et al., 2024).

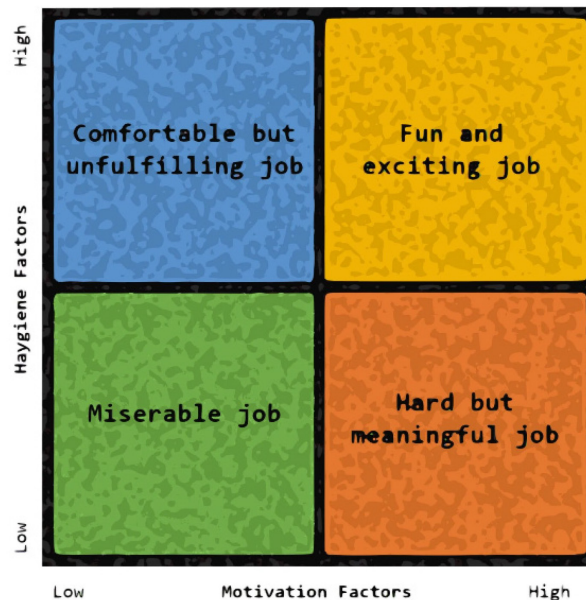
2.3.3 Herzberg's Two-Factor theory and Generation Z Motivation

Recognizing what motivates Generation Z in the workplace requires a multifaceted approach that considers both their basic expectations and their desire for meaningful engagement. A useful framework for understanding these motivational drivers is Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, originally proposed by American psychologist Frederick Herzberg in 1959. The theory offers a foundational explanation for job satisfaction by categorizing motivational influences into two distinct dimensions: hygiene factors and motivators (Zhou and Ma, 2024).

Motivators, often considered intrinsic in nature, relate to aspects of the job that contribute positively to satisfaction and employee engagement. These include opportunities for achievement, recognition, responsibility, career advancement, personal growth and the meaningfulness of the work itself (Daniels, 2023). In contrast, hygiene factors are extrinsic and pertain to the broader work environment. These include elements such as organizational policies, the quality of supervision, job stability, physical work environment, compensation and social interactions in the workplace. Although these factors may not directly enhance motivation, their absence can lead to significant dissatisfaction among employees (Daniels, 2023; Zhou and Ma, 2024).

To visually represent the interaction between hygiene factors and motivation factors, Figure 1 introduces a two-dimensional matrix. The vertical axis reflects hygiene factors, while the horizontal axis represents motivation factors. This framework illustrates how various combinations of these elements shape an individual's overall work experience. Specifically, it shows that high levels of both motivation and hygiene factors are necessary for achieving optimal job satisfaction. Conversely, deficiencies in either can lead to dissatisfaction or result in a neutral, disengaged state (Nickerson, 2025). However, Herzberg argued that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not opposite ends of the same spectrum but are instead driven by distinct groups of factors. In his view, the absence of dissatisfaction does not automatically imply satisfaction and vice versa. This distinction marks a departure from traditional theories, which viewed satisfaction and dissatisfaction as interdependent states (Daniels, 2023; Nickerson, 2025).

In addition, although Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory was developed decades ago, it continues to shape contemporary management practices and remains a widely used framework for understanding employee motivation and job satisfaction in today's organizational settings (Nickerson, 2025). For example, research by Ybañez (2024) in the banking sector highlights how key motivators identified by Herzberg such as recognition, responsibility and opportunities for growth, remain critical drivers of employee engagement. Furthermore, the theory continues to serve as a valuable lens for addressing the needs of newer workforce generations, including Generation Z, whose workplace preferences closely align with both hygiene and motivator factors (Zhou and Ma, 2024).



*Figure 1. A Two-Dimensional Grid of Hygiene and Motivation Factors.
Credit: (Nickerson, 2025)*

2.3.3.1 Herzberg's Theory to Generation Z in the Hybrid Workplace

As digital-natives entering the workforce with distinct values and expectations, Generation Z employees seek not only fair compensation and stable working conditions which is classified as hygiene factors but also opportunities for personal growth, purpose-driven tasks and recognition for their efforts (Zhou and Ma, 2024). These intrinsic needs reflect the motivator dimension of Herzberg's framework, which is essential for achieving true job satisfaction.

These encompass organizational policies, supervision quality, job security, physical working conditions, remuneration and interpersonal relationships. Although these factors do not directly enhance motivation, their absence can eventually lead to dissatisfaction and the balance between hygiene and motivation factors becomes even more critical. For example, inadequate digital infrastructure or unclear communication can exacerbate dissatisfaction due to poor hygiene factors. Conversely, when organizations provide autonomy, career development pathways and

recognition in both virtual and physical settings, they reinforce motivator factors that enhance engagement and retention (Daniels, 2023; Kim and Kim, 2024; Zhou and Ma, 2024).

Furthermore, Herzberg's assertion that satisfaction and dissatisfaction operate on separate continuums offers valuable insight into how Generation Z responds to hybrid work conditions. A workplace that merely removes sources of dissatisfaction for instance, by offering competitive pay or flexible hours may still fail to engage younger employees unless motivators such as achievement, responsibility and growth are actively integrated into their roles (Nickerson, 2025). This dual-focus approach is especially vital for hybrid work environments, where physical disconnection can lead to emotional disengagement if intrinsic motivators are not prioritized. According to research, simultaneously addressing hygiene concerns and cultivating intrinsic motivators, organizations can more effectively support Generation Z's performance and well-being in hybrid work settings (Ybañez, 2024; Zhou and Ma, 2024).

2.3.3.2 Criticisms and Relevance of Herzberg's Theory for Generation Z

Contemporary researchers have critiqued the applicability of this model to the modern workforce, including Generation Z. According to Daniels (2023), one of the main concerns regarding the theory is its cultural and individual limitations. Herzberg's original research was conducted in the United States during the 1950s, which may restrict its relevance across different cultural settings. In addition, the theory assumes a relatively universal response to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, overlooking individual differences such as personality, generational expectations, or personal values. This poses challenges when applying the model to Generation Z, a cohort often characterized by a desire for flexibility, purpose and immediate feedback.

Additionally, authors Zhou and Ma (2024) highlight that the theory has been criticized for placing too much emphasis on intrinsic motivation, potentially undervaluing the importance of extrinsic rewards. An example is that pay wage is an issue that remains highly relevant to Generation Z, who often cite salary transparency and fairness as decisive factors in job satisfaction and turnover. Nevertheless, the theory retains significant contemporary relevance, particularly when adapted to hybrid work environments and emerging workforce trends. Scholars and practitioners continue to draw on its two-dimensional model to identify and address key motivators and dissatisfiers in sectors ranging from banking to technology (Nickerson, 2025; Ybañez, 2024).

2.4 Identifying and Addressing Quiet Quitting in Hybrid Work Environments

The blurred boundaries in hybrid settings can appear to be a significant challenge. Thus, this section uses the Job Demands-Resources Model and McGregor's Theory X and Y to explore the causes of quiet quitting and how leadership and organizational support systems can either exacerbate or reduce this trend.

2.4.1 Disengagement Through the Job Demands-Resources Model

As hybrid work becomes more widespread, the phenomenon of quiet quitting has emerged as a nuanced response to evolving workplace dynamics. Quiet quitting, characterized by employees limiting their efforts to only what is contractually required, is not necessarily an act of rebellion or laziness. Instead, it often reflects a psychological withdrawal prompted by sustained imbalances in the workplace, particularly in hybrid settings where blurred boundaries between work and personal life, coupled with reduced social interaction, can negatively affect employee engagement. This trend is especially prominent among Generation Z, who value autonomy, recognition, flexibility and purpose. When these needs are not met, they may be more prone to disengagement, viewing quiet quitting as a strategy for safeguarding their mental and emotional well-being (Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Liu-Lastres et al., 2023).

To understand such disengagement patterns, the Job Demands-Resources Model offers a compelling theoretical lens. The model categorizes working conditions into two broad dimensions: job demands and job resources (Awwad et al., 2022; Choudhury and Maupin, 2025; Katou et al., 2021). Job demands comprises the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of a role that require ongoing effort and are frequently linked to emotional or cognitive stress. Examples include excessive workload, unclear role expectations and interpersonal tensions. Conversely, job resources are the supports and conditions that facilitate goal achievement, mitigate the negative effects of demands and promote personal and professional development. These can include access to feedback, recognition, autonomy, supportive colleagues as well as opportunities for advancement (Awwad et al., 2022; Choudhury and Maupin, 2025; Liu-Lastres et al., 2023).

However, in hybrid work environments, employees often face heightened demands, such as digital overload, isolation and unclear expectations. At the same time, they have reduced access to vital resources like mentorship, peer support and real-time recognition. Over time, this imbalance between rising demands and dwindling resources may lead to burnout, diminished motivation and ultimately disengagement from work (Awwad et al., 2022; Katou et al., 2021). Therefore, quiet quitting becomes a behavioral manifestation of the Job Demands-Resources imbalance within this context. When individuals perceive that the effort they invest is not met with adequate support or recognition, they may consciously scale back their engagement and focus solely on the bare minimum required (Agarwal et al., 2024; Srivastava et al., 2023).

For Generation Z employees, the implications are particularly significant. This cohort tends to place high importance on meaningful tasks, opportunities for skill development, consistent feedback and work-life integration. As such, a perceived lack of these elements, such as insufficient recognition or limited access to career progression pathways can intensify disengagement and prompt quiet quitting behaviors (Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Formica and Sfodera, 2022). However, the Job Demands-Resources model may not fully capture the complexity of quiet quitting. While an imbalance between demands and resources is a critical driver, some employees may view quiet quitting as a rational strategy to preserve energy, assert boundaries or even resist perceived inequity in the workplace (Agarwal et al., 2024; Katou et al., 2021).

In some cases, quiet quitting does not arise solely from burnout, but also from a shifting value system where individuals choose to prioritize personal fulfillment and interests over traditional notions of productivity and career advancement. Rather than engaging in collective resistance or vocal dissatisfaction, employees may redirect their energy toward pursuits outside of work, especially when they feel underappreciated or disconnected from organizational goals (Agarwal et al., 2024). Therefore, while the Job Demands-Resources framework is instrumental in explaining the structural conditions that give rise to quiet quitting, a more comprehensive understanding must also account for individual motivations, generational attitudes and broader organizational culture (Georgiadou et al., 2025).

2.4.2 Leadership Mindsets Through McGregor's Theory X and Y

According to authors Bakoula and Galanakis (2022), Theory X suggests that employees have an inherent aversion to work, require close supervision and generally seek to avoid responsibility. Leaders with this mindset tend to exercise control through rigid oversight, which may inadvertently elevate job demands and reduce autonomy. In contrast, Theory Y posits that employees are self-motivated, capable of self-direction and derive satisfaction from meaningful tasks. Leaders who adopt this approach are more inclined to trust their teams, encourage initiative and provide opportunities for professional growth. As such, the theory, as discussed by the authors, offers a foundational lens for understanding how leadership assumptions can shape employee behavior, particularly in the context of hybrid work environments.

In hybrid settings, where physical oversight is limited and employee autonomy is essential, Theory Y aligned leadership becomes especially critical. A leadership style rooted in trust, psychological safety and participatory engagement can help counteract the risk of disengagement (Georgiadou et al., 2025). This is particularly important for Generation Z employees, who place high value on autonomy, flexibility and purpose-driven work. According to the same authors, when leaders default to McGregor's Theory X mindsets in hybrid contexts through micromanagement, surveillance or inflexible expectations, they risk undermining these values, contributing to burnout, reduced motivation and ultimately quiet quitting.

In the context of hybrid work environments and Generation Z's preference for autonomy and inclusive leadership, shared leadership closely aligns with the assumptions of Theory Y. Both emphasize the belief that employees are intrinsically motivated and capable of contributing meaningfully when empowered to do so (Mansoor et al., 2025; Rk, 2023). While Theory Y encourages leaders to delegate responsibility and foster trust, shared leadership operationalizes these values by distributing leadership across team members, encouraging collaboration and flattening hierarchical barriers. This approach resonates strongly with Generation Z's expectations for inclusive decision-making, peer collaboration and recognition of individual strengths (Ali and Yushi, 2024; Bakoula and Galanakis, 2022; Jasmine and Utomo, 2024).

3. Analytical Model

Building on this theoretical framework, this study presents an analytical model that outlines the proposed relationships between key constructs based on shared leadership. It is grounded in

existing literature and informed by preliminary insights from the data, highlighting how shared leadership practices may influence the levels of employee engagement and the occurrence of quiet quitting amongst Generation Zs working in hybrid work environments. The model also incorporates underlying sub-dimensions such as autonomy, collaboration, trust and recognition. These are essential to understanding the dynamics between leadership approaches and employee/employer experiences in an organization, based on this context. Figure 2 further illustrates this analytical model, visually capturing the interconnectedness of these constructs and their relevance to the broader organizational dynamics explored in this thesis.

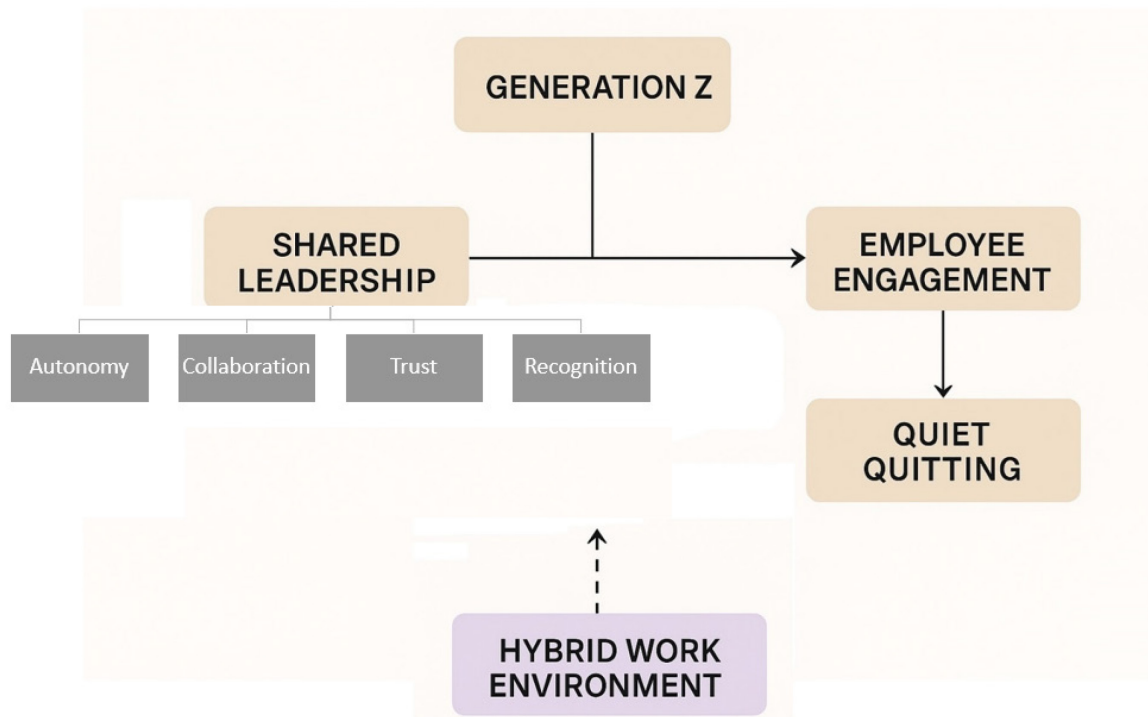


Figure 2: An analytical model linking shared leadership to Generation Z engagement and quiet quitting through 4 key sub-dimensions in hybrid working environments.

4. Methods

This section outlines the methods used to explore shared leadership and quiet quitting among Generation Z in hybrid work environments. It covers the research approach, data collection process and the sample population criteria. Additionally, it also explains the data extraction and analysis process as well as describes the quality standards applied to ensure credibility. Finally, this section concludes by discussing the limitations of the study and the ethical considerations taken to ensure responsible and respectful treatment of participants.

4.1 Research Approach

This study adopts an abductive research approach which allows for a flexible interaction between theory and empirical data. As described by Saunders et al. (2019), abduction begins with observed phenomena and seeks the most plausible theoretical explanation, often moving back and forth between existing theories and participants' lived experiences. In this study, existing theoretical perspectives on shared leadership and quiet quitting help frame the research focus, while the empirical data gathered from participants further shape and refine these understandings.

To ground this approach philosophically, the study is framed within a constructivist paradigm, where authors Abson et al. (2024) and Braun and Clarke (2013) understand reality and knowledge as products of socially and individually constructed truths rather than as objectively fixed truths. From this perspective, reality is not really something that is seen to exist independently but something that is continually shaped by context-driven experiences, personal perceptions and also social interactions with others.

Building on this philosophical stance, this study adopts Interpretative Phenomenology as its guiding scientific approach. Accordingly, Braun and Clarke (2013) describe Interpretative Phenomenology as focusing on how individuals encounter, comprehend and even make sense of phenomena in their everyday lives. Rather than seeking to predict behavior or impose any objective measures, this approach prioritizes the meanings individuals attribute to their own experiences. As such, this approach is particularly well-suited to research exploring personal experiences within specific social contexts such as this study's focus on how shared leadership can possibly influence quiet quitting behaviors among Generation Z employees working in hybrid environments.

Aligned with this philosophical and scientific orientation, the study employs a qualitative research design. Although quantitative research is well-suited for measuring variables, testing hypotheses and producing statistically generalizable results, it may overlook the contextual depth, emotional nuance and subjective meaning that characterize human experiences, particularly in complex social environments like hybrid workplaces. In contrast, qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, enabling the researcher to explore how and why participants think, feel and act in certain ways within specific contexts (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Corbin and Strauss, 2015). This emphasis on depth makes qualitative methods more suitable for this study, which seeks to understand the lived experience and personal interpretation of Generation Z employees and their employers concerning shared leadership and quiet quitting. Additionally, Corbin and Strauss (2015) further highlights that the qualitative approach also allows the researcher to play an active, reflexive role, fostering richer dialogue and enabling dynamic adaptation during data collection and analysis. Furthermore, as Bruan and Clarke (2013) point out, qualitative studies embrace the existence of multiple realities and divergent viewpoints, emphasizing meaning-making over statistical inference.

However, qualitative research tends to be more time-consuming than quantitative approaches, largely due to its interpretative nature, the need for transcribing interview data and the in-depth process of thematic analysis. Nonetheless, the insights gained through this approach are often richer and more aligned with the study's aim to uncover nuanced experiences and emergent patterns within a specific generational and organizational context.

4.2 Data Collection Process

To achieve the purpose of this study, a structured data collection process was designed to ensure the relevance and quality of the information gathered. Emphasis was placed on collecting rich and meaningful data that could directly contribute to answering the research questions. Relevant course literature and publicly available materials such as news articles and organizational websites were reviewed to inform the development of preliminary themes and enhance understanding of the research topic. While this study does not analyze such data in-depth, these sources were used to support the literature study and to offer contextual insights that informed the primary research focus. Such use of multiple materials contributes to triangulation, which emphasized the value of combining multiple sources to enhance research credibility (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

4.2.1 Literature Study

Apart from course literature, a range of academic articles were also consulted, including several from high-ranking journals listed in the ABS 2024 guide. For instance, these resources were accessed primarily through the Mid Sweden University library database, which provided access to a wide range of academic journals, industry reports and organizational publications. The ABS 2024 guide serves as a recognized benchmark for academic rigor by ranking journals based on their quality and impact (Academic Journal Guide, 2024). This, in turn, supports the development of a robust theoretical framework. Initial search keywords such as “leadership,” “shared leadership,” “Generation Z,” “hybrid work,” “remote work” and “traditional leadership” were strategically applied to guide the search process.

The search process began by entering relevant keywords from the study's objectives into the University's library database. In order to ensure relevance and precision, Boolean operators such as AND and OR were applied. This approach, according to Saunders et al. (2019) helps narrow down the results to studies directly aligned with the key themes of this study. Platforms such as EBSCOhost provided the opportunity to review article abstracts at a glance. Articles deemed potentially suitable were then reviewed in more detail to ensure alignment with the study. Furthermore, the initial results were reduced by applying a publication year filter, limiting results to current articles published within the past five years. This was to keep up with current literature within the topic. Also, only peer-reviewed articles and those published in English were used as well. Table 1 outlines the search procedure used to obtain relevant materials for the literature study. Using the same filter method as above, the search was further narrowed to prioritize articles within the business discipline and that on the list of ABS 2024 Academic Journal Guide to strengthen credibility of the articles used in the study. Table 2 presents these search outcomes, while Appendix 9.1 even provides specific ABS 2024 rankings for each of these journals

mentioned. However, although priority was given to ABS-ranked journals, a variety of credible academic sources were also included to ensure a comprehensive and well-rounded theoretical foundation.

Table 1: Search Procedure for Literature Study

Step	Description
Databases Accessed	Mid Sweden University Library database (including Scopus, EBSCOhost).
Types of Sources	Peer-reviewed journal articles and course literature.
Journal Ranking	Mostly high-ranking journals listed in the ABS 2024 Academic Journal Guide (Ranking from 1-4, with 1 being the highest tier).
Time Frame	Publications from the past five years (2020 to 2025).
Selection Criteria	English peer-reviewed articles, business related journals or similar, relevance to leadership, Generation Z, hybrid/remote work environments and quiet quitting themes.
Purpose	To build a theoretical foundation and inform the design of the exploratory survey and semi-structured interview guide.

Table 2: Search Outcome for Literature Study

Keywords used	Outcome
“Leadership OR Shared Leadership AND Traditional leadership”	Number of results: 930 Used: 5 articles In ABS 2024 Ranked Journals: 5 articles
Shared leadership AND Traditional Leadership	Number of results: 50 Used: 3 articles In ABS 2024 Ranked Journals: 3 articles
Shared Leadership AND Hybrid Work OR Remote work	Number of results: 194 Used: 4 articles In ABS 2024 Ranked Journals: 4 articles
Hybrid Work OR Remote AND Quiet Quitting	Number of results: 25 Used: 3 articles In ABS 2024 Ranked Journals: 3 articles
Quiet Quitting AND Generation Z OR Gen Z	Number of results: 485 Used: 4 articles In ABS 2024 Ranked Journals: 4 articles
Leadership AND Remote Work AND Gen Z AND Quiet Quitting	Number of results: 2 Articles Used: 2 articles In ABS 2024 Ranked Journals: 2 articles

4.2.2 Primary Data Collection

Primary data was collected through an online survey and semi-structured interviews. The survey targeted Generation Z employees in hybrid roles, while interviews were conducted with both Generation Z employees and employers who work with Generation Z, to explore leadership experiences and perceptions in greater depth.

4.2.2.1 Online survey

Primary data was collected to gain firsthand insights into the research questions. Primary data, as highlighted by Saunders et al., (2019), is when new data is collected purposely for the research that is being conducted. A short exploratory survey with 32 respondents was used to gather qualitative data from participants. According to the same authors, exploratory surveys are useful for gaining preliminary insights into a topic and for informing more detailed qualitative studies. The survey was designed to collect demographic information and initial perspectives on leadership experiences, shared leadership practices and signs of quiet quitting among Generation Z employees in hybrid work environments.

However, these supplementary data are intended solely to offer complementary perspectives, designed to identify patterns in leadership perception, engagement, communication quality and trust among Generation Z employees in hybrid work settings. Moreover, one limitation was that the self-reported format of the survey may have led to response bias where participants may possibly provide socially desirable answers. Nonetheless, the aim of the survey was to still capture a range of perspectives from different individuals who did not have the luxury of time to participate in our interviews.

All participants for the survey were recruited through professional networks and social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and acquaintances from university. This study used the convenience sampling method as well as the snowball sampling method since we also encouraged our respondents to share the survey with their fellow contacts who fitted the criteria. Convenience sampling method, as described by Saunders et al. (2019) is a widely used method in participant-based research, involving selecting participants primarily based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the study rather than through a random selection. At the same time, the same authors describe snowball sampling as a method often associated with convenience sampling and refers to building on respondents' networks by asking them to recommend and refer to eligible participants who might also want to participate as well. These approaches helped reach a broader and more diverse group of participants who were otherwise difficult to access through random sampling methods.

The phase of the data collection for this survey was initiated on 10th May 2025 and completed on 18th May 2025. All survey questions were in English only. Participants received a link with study information and anonymity assurances including our contact details for necessary reach out.

To ensure a structured and comprehensive approach to data collection, the survey was divided into six sections. These sections were designed to capture key aspects of participants' demographic backgrounds, experiences with hybrid work, leadership perceptions and engagement levels. Overall, the survey consisted of 25 open- and closed-ended questions which

were designed to be concise and allow flexibility in responses. On average, the survey took approximately 5-10 minutes to complete, based on feedback from some respondents. Table 3. provides an overview of the survey structure, outlining the number of questions, the type of questions employed and the specific focus of each section. Appendix 9.2 also shows the survey instructions and the exact questions asked.

Table 3: Overview of Online Survey Structure

Section	Number of Questions	Question Type	Purpose
Section 1: Demographics	2	Open-ended	To obtain background information about participants.
Section 2: Hybrid Work Experience	4	Closed-ended (Multiple choice)	To assess participant's experience in hybrid work.
Section 3: Leadership in Hybrid Work Settings	4	Mix of closed-ended: (Multiple choice & Likert scale) and open-ended	To assess participants' perception of leadership clarity and awareness.
Section 4: Workload Responsibilities & Job Satisfaction	6	Closed-ended (Multiple choice & Likert scale)	To evaluate Job satisfaction with assigned tasks, workload, recognition and trust.
Section 5: Team Communication in Hybrid Work Settings	3	Closed-ended (Likert scale)	To explore communication effectiveness and support within hybrid teams.
Section 6: Thoughts & Personal Insights on Shared Leadership	6	Mix of closed-ended: (Multiple choice & Likert scale) and open-ended	To investigate participants' experiences, motivations and opinions on leadership styles and disengagement risks.

4.2.2.2 Semi-Structured Interview

To explore participants' experiences in greater depth, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted. To our best knowledge, there was no overlap between interview participants and survey respondents, although this cannot be confirmed due to the nature of the survey's convenience and snowball sampling methods. As Braun and Clarke (2013) note, semi-structured interviews offer a flexible yet focused approach to gathering rich, detailed accounts of participants' views while allowing room for unexpected insights. In this regard and following the interpretivist approach, the interview was made flexible as we carefully listened to their answers and asked follow-up questions where necessary. However, one limitation was the high degree of variation in the interview responses such as in terms of length and the level of detail provided.

While some participants offered rich, reflective insights with concrete examples, others gave brief or general answers. For example, some employee participants provided insightful revelations when asked about how leadership behaviors influenced their engagement and sense of belonging, while others responded with short statements like “I didn’t really notice.” However, we used probing questions during interviews to encourage elaboration and clarification where needed.

All interview participants were recruited through a convenience sampling method via professional networks and social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and acquaintances from university. Subsequently, those who expressed interest were provided with an interview guide (as shown in appendix 9.3) via email which outlined the study’s purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality assurances, estimated timeframe for the interview and also a list of the interview questions that would be asked so that they could be prepared in advance.

The phase of the data collection for our interviews was initiated on 10th May 2025 and completed on 15th May 2025. Working as a pair, the interview responsibilities were divided and conducted separately, which allowed us to make efficient use of our time. Thus, the data collection phase for the interviews was shorter than the survey because we quickly reached our targeted number of respondents during this time frame. All interviews were conducted in English. Participants were given the option to select a convenient time for their interviews, which all but 1 interview was conducted virtually, while the other was face-to-face. Participants were also asked to provide verbal consent for audio recording and the recorded interview was subsequently transcribed.

To guide the semi-structured interviews, a thematic framework was developed to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility in responses. Table 4 and Table 5 present an overview of the interview structure for employers and employees respectively. In total, the interview guide for employers comprised 24 questions, while the guide for employees comprised 23 questions. These questions were organized into sections designed to capture demographic context, explore leadership experiences in hybrid work environments and gather insights on engagement and generational dynamics, particularly concerning Generation Z.

*Table 4: Overview of Interview Structure for **Employers***

Section	Number of questions	Purpose
Section 1		
Initial Control Questions	8	To confirm participant eligibility, gather demographic and organizational context as well as determine relevance based on experience with hybrid work environments and work experience with Generation Z employees.

Section 2		
Main Questions	-	
1. Understanding Your Leadership Style	5	To explore how employers approach decision-making, task delegation trust-building and how their style adapts when working with Generation Z team members.
2. Leading in a Hybrid Working Environment	4	To understand how hybrid work has transformed leadership roles, identify challenges and benefits as well as assess generational responses to this shift.
3. Noticing Disengagement and Quiet Quitting	3	To identify how leaders perceive and respond to disengagement and quiet quitting behaviors, with attention to generational differences and leadership approaches.
4. Addressing Engagement through Leadership	3	To evaluate leadership strategies that support engagement, particularly among Generation Z employees and understand proactive practices for re-engagement.
5. Further comments	1	To gather additional insights or personal reflections that may not have been addressed in earlier sections but are relevant to leadership and engagement in hybrid teams.

Table 5: Overview of Interview Structure for *Employees*

Section	Number of questions	Purpose
Section 1		
Initial Control Questions	8	To confirm participant eligibility, obtain informed consent as well as collect essential contextual information regarding

		demographics, work environment and organizational background.
Section 2		
Main Questions	-	
1. Leadership Experience	4	To explore participants' personal experiences with different leadership styles and assess how those styles impact motivation, communication and team relationships.
2. Hybrid Work Experience	4	To understand how hybrid work environments influence motivation, communication and team/manager relationships. Additionally, to identify key tools and practices used in remote collaborations.
3. Reflections on Engagement at Work	3	To examine factors that lead to disengagement or increased engagement at work and how leadership actions affect employees' emotional and professional responses.
4. Re-engagement and Leadership Preferences	3	To identify preferred leadership behaviors in hybrid settings and explore how leadership traits influence trust, engagement and team dynamics.
5. Further comments	1	To gather additional insights or personal reflections that may not have been addressed in earlier sections but are relevant to leadership and engagement in hybrid teams.

4.3 Sample Population

This section outlines the process used to recruit and select study participants, encompassing both semi-structured interviews and an online survey. Specifically, it provides an overview of the required characteristics of each sample group employed to identify eligible respondents.

4.3.1 Semi-Structured Interview

The interview sample for this study comprised Generation Z employees of all genders, born from 1997 to 2012. Participants had to fulfill another criteria of either currently working or having previously worked in a hybrid work environment. This focus was important in order to capture insights from individuals who are both digital natives and directly affected by hybrid work structures. Aside from the focus on Generation Z, employers who have experienced working with this generation were also interviewed to understand their viewpoint and gain different perspectives as well.

Table 6 provides a summary of the participants who took part in this study. In total, 10 respondents were interviewed. Of these, 5 were Generation Z employees, while the remaining 5 were current and/or former employers with experience managing Generation Z team members.

Notably, one participant identified as both a Generation Z employee and a former team leader, offering a valuable dual perspective. Also, to accommodate participants' availability and location, the majority of interviews were conducted digitally, either via Zoom video calls or WhatsApp audio calls. However, one interview was conducted face-to-face at a café in Sundsvall. Each interview lasted approximately 25 to 50 minutes.

Table 6: Summary of interview participants

Participant	Participant type (Birth year)	Country of work	Organizational type (Years Worked)	Interview date	Interview method	Interview duration (mins)
1	Employee (1999)	Ghana	Private- Audit sector (5 Years)	11/5/2025	WhatsApp Audio Call	25.50
2	Employee (1997)	Sweden	Government sector (5 Years)	11/5/2025	Face-to-Face	28.51
3	Employer (1994)	Singapore	Private- Sports sector (7 Years in a Leadership Role)	13/5/2025	Zoom Video Call	35.28
4	Employee (2001)	Ghana	Private- Legal sector (11 Months)	13/5/2025	WhatsApp Audio Call	29.38

5	Former Team Leader (2000)	Sweden/ The United States	Private- Digital Marketing sector (10 Months in a Leadership Role)	14/5/2025	WhatsApp Audio Call	26.18
6	Former Employer (1974)	Singapore	Private- Consultancy sector (6 Years in a Leadership Role)	14/5/2025	WhatsApp Audio Call	51.39
7	Employer (1994)	Singapore	Private- Education and Forex sector (3 Years in a Leadership Role)	14/5/2025	WhatsApp Audio Call	50.02
8	Employee (1999)	Ghana	Private- FinTech sector (1 Year)	15/5/2025	WhatsApp Audio Call	31.48
9	Employee (2002)	Ghana	Public Sector (4 Years)	15/5/2025	WhatsApp Audio Call	44.50
10	Employer (1977)	Sweden	Government Sector (4 Years in a Leadership Role)	15/5/2025	Zoom Video Call	41.13

4.3.2 Online survey

For the online survey, the sample population for this study consisted only of Generation Z employees working in hybrid work environments. This followed the same criteria as above which was: regardless of their gender, participants were instead selected based on their age (born 1997-2012). In addition, participants had to fulfill another criterion of either currently working or having previously worked in a hybrid work environment.

Table 7 provides a summary of the respondents who participated in the online survey, including information like their year of birth and country of work. A total number of 35 Generation Z respondents participated. However, during the data cleaning process, 3 responses were identified as invalid due to inconsistencies in the responses, particularly with the first question regarding their year of birth. Despite our intention to target only Generation Z (born 1997-2012), which was specifically indicated under our survey's introduction and instructions, we still received responses from individuals who did not meet this criterion. Thus, these responses were therefore excluded from the final analysis and we eventually used data from the other 32 respondents only.

In hindsight, explicitly stating the birth year range in the question as well could have helped prevented this issue, which we acknowledge an oversight on our part.

These final participants came from diverse geographic locations including Sweden, Singapore, Ghana, Australia, the United States and others. Furthermore, most respondents were born between 1997 and 2000.

Also, a majority of these participants have currently worked in hybrid team settings for more than three years, indicating a substantial level of experience in this type of work environment. In comparison, 31% of the participants reported having worked in hybrid teams for “1-3 years,” while only 19% of the participants indicated “less than 1 year” of experience.

Additionally, five participants from the overall survey sample reported having prior experience with hybrid work but were not currently working in such an environment. During their tenure, all of them had worked in hybrid settings for more than a year. As such, the prevalence of long-term exposure to hybrid work among both current and former participants reinforces the credibility of their insights and points to the growing normalization of hybrid work arrangements across diverse regions.

Table 7: Summary of survey participants

Participant	Year of Birth	Country of Work
1	1997	Sweden
2	2000	Ghana
3	2005	Ghana
4	1997	Sweden
5	2000	Sweden
6	1997	Singapore
7	1998	Singapore
8	1998	Singapore
9	1998	India
10	1998	Malawi
11	1995	Sweden
12	1999	China
13	2000	Singapore
14	1998	Sweden
15	1997	Sweden
16	1997	Sweden
17	2001	Sweden
18	2000	Sweden
19	1999	Philippines
20	2001	Australia

21	1998	Singapore
22	2000	Australia
23	2000	The United States
24	1997	Thailand
25	1998	Singapore
26	1998	The United States
27	2000	Sweden
28	1999	France
29	2000	Sweden
30	1998	Germany
31	2001	Sweden
32	1997	Malaysia

4.4 Data Analysis Extraction Process

Following the completion of the semi-structured interviews and the online survey, the data was systematically prepared for analysis. As mentioned earlier, all semi-structured interviews were recorded with participants' consent. We used digital recording tools like the recording function on our Samsung mobile and tablet devices for the recording. Additionally, written notes were also taken during real-time to capture any immediate observations and important keywords. Subsequently, these audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to allow for a detailed examination. To manage our time effectively and avoid last-minute work, we transcribed the interviews on the same day they were conducted. We also took extra care and consideration during the transcription process to preserve the authenticity of the participants' narratives which included any of their specific language, phrasing and particular emphasis. These comprehensive preparations ensured the accuracy and richness of the dataset captured before our formal analysis began which was recommended by authors Braun and Clarke (2013).

4.4.1 Data Coding and Analytical Process

The analytical process involved several stages. These stages were guided by Braun and Clarke's (2013) thematic analysis framework, which provides a flexible, yet systematic approach within a dataset for identifying, interpreting and reporting patterns of meaning. Importantly, our approach was informed by the theoretical concepts and sub-dimensions outlined in our analytical model (Figure 2), related to shared leadership. This structured lens distinguished our method from grounded theory as the aim was not to generate a new theory but to examine participants' experiences through an existing conceptual framework. Initially, interview transcripts and survey responses were read multiple times to ensure deep familiarity with the data as well.

This was followed by the coding phase, where meaningful excerpts were assigned initial codes. These codes were guided by both the study's theoretical focus and the sub-dimensions of shared leadership, serving as the foundation for further analysis. The codes were then reviewed for relevance, overlap and clarity in an iterative process to refine their alignment with the research

focus. Finally, related codes were grouped into preliminary themes. These themes were mapped against key areas in the analytical model, providing a framework for the deeper interpretive analysis presented in the following chapter. For example, codes reflecting decision-making participation and proactive contributions were associated with autonomy and collaboration, linking directly to Shared Leadership Theory and McGregor's Theory Y assumption. Similarly, expressions of emotional support or lack of responsiveness were linked to trust, reinforcing perspectives from Social Exchange Theory and Leader-Member Exchange or Team-Member Exchange frameworks. This analytical strategy allowed for a structured yet flexible interpretation of the data that was grounded in both empirical patterns and theoretical expectations.

To present the findings clearly, these themes were then organized into four main subheadings: 5.1 Understanding Leadership Dynamics in the Workplace, 5.2 Communication in Hybrid Work, 5.3 Motivation and Engagement of Generation Z and 5.4 Trust in Hybrid Teams. In addition, to enhance transparency and illustrate the progression from raw data to theme development, some examples of initial codes and data excerpts from each participant were also presented in corresponding tables throughout the analysis section. This structure was chosen in this logical order for a detailed exploration of how shared leadership influences engagement and quiet quitting behaviors among Generation Z employees in hybrid work environments. It not only enabled a coherent presentation of the results but also ensured that the nuanced perspectives of Generation Z employees and employers of Generation Zs were meaningfully represented.

4.5 Quality Standards

This section outlines the techniques used to maintain quality and addresses potential challenges encountered during our research process.

4.5.1 Credibility

To further enhance the depth of our findings and also allow for a cross-verification of our findings from different sources, this study incorporates the triangulation method. First proposed by sociologist Norman Denzin in 1970, authors Braun and Clarke (2013) note that triangulation can also involve incorporating insights and contributions from multiple researchers to further enrich the analysis by drawing on different standpoints and integrating diverse perspectives. Specifically, this study integrates three qualitative methods. These methods include: (1) a review of peer-reviewed literature and relevant online sources to build a strong theoretical framework, (2) a qualitative, exploratory online survey aimed at Generation Z employees to gather broad experiential insights and lastly, (3) semi-structured interviews with selected employees and employers who also have experience working with Generation Zs to delve deeper into individual experiences.

Moreover, member checking was also utilized to some extent during our interviews with participants to further enhance the trustworthiness of our findings. Participants were given summaries of their responses to confirm the accuracy of their contributions. This process, according to research by Braun and Clarke (2013), was one example of a 'credibility check', serving as a qualitative equivalent to reliability in quantitative research. This ensures that the

interpretations genuinely reflect the participants' intended meanings. In addition, participants were also asked reflective questions based on insights from existing literature, based on our theoretical framework. This approach allowed us to assess whether participants' experiences aligned with established research findings, thereby supporting both the credibility and depth of our interpretations.

Finally, the use of an interview guide sent to participants before the start of the interview also helped maintain consistency across interviews while still allowing for flexibility to explore new themes as they emerged.

One key challenge to credibility was ensuring that our interpretations remained grounded in the original data and did not reflect researcher bias. To address this, a clear audit trail of the research process was documented which, according to Braun and Clarke's (2013), enhances transparency in qualitative research. Furthermore, raw data such as transcripts from the interviews with participants and survey responses were also systematically referenced during the thematic analysis, reflecting Corbin and Strauss's (2015) emphasis on grounding interpretations in the data to enhance credibility and reduce researcher bias. As a result, not only did this allow for transparency and traceability, it also ensured that the interpretations could be clearly linked back to participant accounts and supporting materials. Apart from that, the online survey responses also underwent data cleaning to maintain the integrity of the dataset. A small number of responses were removed due to inconsistencies as this may affect the data and reliability of the final analysis.

4.5.2 Transferability

Braun and Clarke (2013) highlight that transferability refers to the degree to which the study's findings are transferable or applicable to different settings or populations. As the authors note, the concept of transferability was outlined by educational researchers, Lincoln and Guba in 1985 as part of their early framework for assessing the quality criteria for research in qualitative studies. These researchers emphasize that it is ultimately the reader's responsibility to determine whether the study's context is sufficiently comparable to their own to justify applying these insights meaningfully elsewhere.

For example, given the qualitative nature of this thesis and its focus on Generation Z employees in hybrid working environments, the aim was to provide rich descriptions that could offer meaningful insights for organizations operating in similar work contexts. To support transferability, careful attention was paid to providing contextual information about participants, their professional backgrounds as well as the organizational settings they work in. Some of these include the level of autonomy provided to employees as well as the use of digital tools. Furthermore, descriptions such as work structures, leadership interactions and hybrid arrangements were also included to allow readers to determine if these findings might resonate with or be relevant to their own settings who might find this information valuable when considering leadership practices that engage Generation Z employees effectively in hybrid settings.

One key challenge to transferability was ensuring that enough contextual detail was provided to enable meaningful comparisons by readers. To address this, we documented each participant's profile with care and preserved raw, anonymized excerpts from interviews to support the descriptions. These were integrated into the analysis to provide illustrative quotes and examples. This also supports Corbin and Strauss's (2015) emphasis on systematic documentation as a foundation for credible and transferable findings. Additionally, by maintaining an audit trail of how findings were derived from raw data, we aimed to improve transparency and allow others to follow the logic of our interpretations. This approach similarly reflects Braun and Clarke's (2013) view that audit trails strengthen transparency in qualitative research and this documentation supports readers in making informed judgments about how applicable the findings may be to their own contexts.

4.6 Research Limitations

Several limitations were identified in the course of this study. As a result, it should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Firstly, one notable limitation was the predominant use of virtual interviews conducted via Zoom video calls and WhatsApp audio calls rather than in-person, face-to-face interactions. This format constrained the ability to observe non-verbal cues such as posture, gestures and other body language that often enrich qualitative interpretation. These non-verbal elements could have offered deeper insight into participants' emotional responses, particularly when discussing sensitive issues like disengagement or exclusion in the workplace. Thus, the absence of this layer of observation may have limited the depth of analysis in some cases. However, the use of virtual interviews also presented practical advantages. It allowed us to engage participants more flexibly, accommodating their schedules and overcoming geographic barriers. This flexibility contributed to a more diverse and accessible sample, which enriched the overall data collection process.

Secondly, the study only relied on a single round of data collection, offering only a snapshot of participants' experiences at a single moment in time. This was due to the limited timeframe for conducting the study. Although the findings contributed to some insights to a certain extent, a longitudinal design, such as conducting follow-up interviews, could have captured how leadership styles, motivation and team dynamics shift over time, especially in response to changes in leadership behavior or organizational context. This temporal perspective would have added greater nuance to understanding the evolving nature of shared leadership in hybrid settings.

Thirdly, while the study gathered valuable insights through 32 survey responses and 10 semi-structured interviews from various industries and regions, the relatively small sample size restricts the extent to which the findings can be applied to broader populations or contexts. Although this number was sufficient to support our qualitative analysis to a certain extent, a broader and more diverse sample may have captured a wider range of perspectives, particularly

given the variety of backgrounds, roles and experiences that exist within Generation Z and across organizational contexts and maybe a particular industry.

Fourthly, logistical challenges in scheduling interviews resulted in missed opportunities to engage certain individuals, including those with valuable subject-matter expertise who were ultimately unavailable. In some cases, the scheduling of interviews was relatively considered last-minute, as the data collection period spanned only six days, including the weekends. As a result, some potential participants were unavailable during that timeframe and indicated that they would have preferred more advanced notice to arrange their participation. Furthermore, a couple of potential participants had even expressed that the interviews were too lengthy for their preference, discouraging their participation. Moreover, we also experienced a few interviewees failing to attend their scheduled sessions despite confirming their availability and receiving reminders, effectively becoming unresponsive thereafter.

Fifthly, the geographic distribution of participants introduced an imbalance between employee and employer representation. A majority of the employee participants were based in Ghana, while most employers were based in Singapore. This geographic concentration may have inadvertently shaped the perspectives shared, particularly around leadership styles, workplace culture and communication norms. In addition, while many professionals in Sweden are proficient in English, some potential participants, such as Swedish natives declined to participate because they were not comfortable being interviewed in a non-native language. This limited the available pool of respondents in Sweden and may have restricted the cultural diversity and richness of the data. Thus, we acknowledge that a more evenly distributed sample across different countries and regions could have introduced a broader spectrum of insights and helped reveal how regional differences influence hybrid work dynamics.

Finally, the exclusive focus on Generation Z employees means that perspectives from other generational cohorts, particularly Millennials, who form a significant portion of today's workforce were not captured. This limits the potential for intergenerational comparison, which could have enriched the findings by highlighting differences or similarities in leadership expectations and engagement drivers. Moreover, all interviewed leaders in this study represented a range of generational background groups. While this provided a degree of generational diversity, the perspectives of emerging Generation Z leaders were still limited.

These limitations suggest the need for broader and more varied sampling in future research, ideally complemented by more flexible and/or extended data collection approaches.

4.7 Ethical Consideration

This study was carried out in line with the requirements for the completion of a Master's degree at Mid Sweden University, which is in line with the university's ethical research guidelines on their website (Mittuniversitetet, n.d.). We adhered to established principles of good research practice throughout the process and these guidelines served as a benchmark for ensuring honesty, transparency and academic integrity during the entire thesis project.

Ethical practice in this study is demonstrated by the proper acknowledgment of all sources and the avoidance of academic misconduct. This includes full adherence to plagiarism policies and a strict commitment to avoiding the falsification or fabrication of data. We also ensured that all materials used were appropriately referenced and credited by the right sources. As a result, the study was carefully conducted to meet the highest ethical standards, with no known instances of misconduct. This reflects the deontological approach described by Braun and Clarke (2013), which focuses on the ethical integrity of the research process itself, rather than solely on outcomes.

Moreover, prior to data collection, approval was obtained from our thesis supervisor for both the survey and interview instruments. The feedback provided the opportunity for correction and ensured they met a certain level of standard before being allowed to proceed.

Additionally, participants in the online survey were informed of the purpose of the study, their right to anonymity and the academic nature of the research. Moreover, no personally identifiable data such as names, email addresses or contact information was gathered during this study, consistent with the standards of ethical principles of privacy and confidentiality as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013). This was in order to protect participants' privacy and encourage honest responses.

As for the interviews, participants were informed in advance that the sessions would be recorded for transcription purposes. Furthermore, verbal consent was also obtained after the recording process was explained clearly to each participant. They were also informed that all responses were anonymous at the same time. Lastly, in accordance with ethical assurances, all audio recordings were deleted following the completion of the study. Moreover, to ensure inclusivity, participation was voluntary, language was kept simple and participants were also encouraged to seek clarification without pressure to continue if they felt uncomfortable.

Finally, as the study focuses on leadership and Generation Z, we acknowledged the potential ethical concern of familiarity with some of our participants who happen to fit the criteria of our study. To address this, we maintained professional boundaries throughout the data collection process and engaged in continuous self-reflection to minimize potential bias. While qualitative research allows for a level of researcher involvement that contrasts with the objectivity emphasized in positivist methods as highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2013), we remained guided by ethical awareness and methodological rigor.

4.8 Impact on Society

The findings of this study may contribute to a broader understanding of how leadership intersects with generational expectations, emotional engagement and evolving attitudes toward work. By situating quiet quitting within wider societal concerns such as mental well-being, autonomy and identity among younger workers, it highlights the emotional dimensions of workplace engagement, particularly behavioral signs of withdrawal. These often-overlooked behavioral

indicators, such as reduced initiative, silence in meetings and delayed communication draws attention to underlying mental strain, proposing that early recognition and intervention can enhance workplace well-being and strengthen broader public mental health resilience. This, however, encourages a rethinking of how work is experienced and understood in contemporary contexts.

Moreover, rather than viewing disengagement solely through an organizational lens, this study also adds to the broader social discourse on how individuals navigate meaning, motivation and belonging within flexible work environments. This highlights the importance of incorporating generational perspectives into discussions about the future of work.

Additionally, by proposing early strategies to detect and address disengagement, this study offers insights that may help reduce both the economic and emotional costs of quiet quitting. In turn, this can contribute to the development of more resilient, responsive and productive work communities benefiting not only organizations but society at large.

As a result, by supporting the development of leadership models grounded in collaboration and shared responsibility, this study contributes to a more sustainable and socially responsive vision for the evolving world of work.

5. Analysis

The analysis draws on the analytical model and data collected through structured interviews, which provided detailed insights into participants' experiences within hybrid work environments. These findings are organized into four core thematic areas, each addressing a distinct aspect of workplace dynamics. The first theme delves into leadership dynamics, exploring how various management styles are interpreted and experienced. The second focuses on communication practices in hybrid teams. The third theme examines motivation and engagement and lastly, the fourth theme investigates how trust is built, maintained or challenged in hybrid settings. Furthermore, more detailed connections between participant responses and relevant theoretical concepts are also elaborated in the main text throughout the thematic analysis.

In addition to interview data, employee survey responses are also qualitatively integrated throughout the analysis where applicable, to enrich the interpretation of key patterns and provide broader context. Again, these supplementary data are only intended solely to offer complementary perspectives and enhance triangulation. Percentages have also been rounded to the nearest whole number for clarity.

5.1 Understanding Leadership Dynamics in the Workplace

This section provides a comprehensive overview of leadership dynamics in the workplace by examining two key perspectives: employers' leadership styles and employees' experiences and preferences regarding their managers' approaches. It explores how leaders adapt their styles, ranging from adaptive, situational and participative to democratic and collaborative. This is

based on team needs, task complexity and generational differences, particularly focusing on interactions with Generation Z employees.

Two tables accompany this analysis to illustrate how key patterns emerged from the interview data. Table 8 presents selected excerpts from employer interviews alongside initial coding labels, offering insight into how leadership approaches are shaped by personal experience, role context and strategic preferences. This table provides a snapshot of the variety of leadership styles and strategies employed by different leaders to manage diverse teams effectively. Complementing this, Table 9 summarizes employees' feedback on their managers' leadership styles, revealing their preferences, challenges and expectations. These employee perspectives highlight the impact of leadership from the viewpoint of younger generations adapting to evolving workplace norms. However, these tables are just a brief overview, with more examples of quotes from participants discussed in the main text.

5.1.1 Employers Leadership Style

Table 8: Brief overview of employers' quotes and initial codes in relation to their leadership styles

Data Excerpt	Initial Code
"Gen Zs are very opinionated. You can't just say 'do this.' You need to involve them, or they'll resist. But if you engage them, they bring fresh ideas." - <i>Participant 3</i>	Adaptive Leadership
"I like to kind of leave it open to a discussion where I would come in with an idea... and we would spend the next 30-45 minutes... thinking of alternatives..." - <i>Participant 5</i>	Participative Leadership
"Each situation demands a different kind of leader. Sometimes you need someone strict to push things forward, other times you need someone to listen and involve the team." - <i>Participant 6</i>	Situational and Adaptive Leadership
"My leadership style is more of a democratic leadership style whereby before coming to a decision, I'll actually either speak to the members involved individually. Or sometimes, I will just straight away discuss the issue with the team and ask for like a small voting." - <i>Participant 7</i>	Democratic Leadership
"I'd say it's collaborative. In more technical or policy-sensitive areas, I might lead the decision. But in general, I really try to involve the team, especially when it comes to planning or process improvements." - <i>Participant 10</i>	Collaborative Leadership

Participants shared a range of perspectives on leadership styles within hybrid work environments, with a strong emphasis on adaptability, team inclusion and situational decision-making. These approaches were often shaped by prior leadership experiences, personal values and the evolving expectations of managing diverse teams in hybrid settings.

Participant 3, who was born in 1994 and has held leadership roles for 7 years as both a supervisor and general manager at a private fitness club in Singapore, demonstrated a strong preference for adaptive leadership. She oversees a team structured into three core departments, namely: Sales, Fitness/Personal Training and Customer Service/Front of House. Her leadership approach varies depending on the nature and complexity of the task. She explained: *“If it is something that I have to work on the P&L (Profit & Loss), then I will make the decision and I’ll execute it to the team. But if it’s process-based, then I will get team involvement.”* This reflects the notion that leadership roles can shift fluidly within teams, as emphasized by Klasmeier et al. (2025), where influence is shaped contextually rather than fixed hierarchically.

Similarly, Participant 6 who was born in 1974 demonstrated a predominantly adaptive and situational leadership style, developed over her 6 years as a Deputy Country Manager in a relocation company in Singapore. This adaptability resembles what Abson et al. (2024) refer to as the coexistence of multiple leadership forms in modern teams, which allows leaders to respond more effectively to hybrid work demands. Her approach was characterized by ongoing adjustments in management strategy based on team composition, generational preferences and task complexity. Describing her leadership flexibility, she remarked: *“Each situation demands a different kind of leader. Sometimes you need someone strict to push things forward, other times you need someone to listen and involve the team.”* Additionally, she placed more focus on managing expectations through emotional support and structured delegation. For example, she valued open-door policies with her employees regardless of their age group and seniority level, emphasizing her relational positioning as a “guardian” or “big sister” and how she maintained close contact even with some of her previous employees who had relocated abroad. This also aligns with high-quality Leader-Member Exchange relationships, where emotional trust and support are central, according to Lu et al. (2024).

Like Participant 6, Participant 10, who was born in 1977 and is a government section manager with 3 years of leadership experience in Sweden, also practiced an adaptive leadership style that balanced authority with collaboration and flexibility based on situational needs. This style also aligns with research by Abson et al. (2024) and Klasmeier et al. (2025) which illustrates how multiple leadership forms can coexist in hybrid teams, allowing influence to shift based on context rather than rigid hierarchy. While he maintained final decision-making authority in high-stakes or sensitive matters, he strongly encouraged initiative and critical thinking in day-to-day operations. As he explained: *“For a lot of things, we come to a consensus. But when it comes to important or sensitive decisions, then it’s still my final call.”* When probed further, he elaborated on his collaborative approach, particularly in less critical scenarios: *“I’d say it’s collaborative. In more technical or policy-sensitive areas, I might lead the decision. But in general, I really try to involve the team, especially when it comes to planning or process improvements.”* In addition to collaboration, task transparency and empowerment were key elements of his leadership strategy, where he described his aversion to micromanagement and preference for autonomous team problem-solving: *“I’m not someone who likes to micromanage. I give direction but I expect them to think and problem-solve.”* This suggests McGregor's Theory Y mindset, where employees are seen as capable and self-directed, a style more suitable for hybrid and generationally diverse teams, as previously highlighted by Bakoula and Galanakis (2022).

On the other hand, other employers leaned more toward participative or democratic styles, focused on team inclusion. For instance, Participant 5 is a Generation Z employee who was born in 2000 and is currently living in Sweden while freelancing. He had also served as a digital marketing team leader for 10 months in the United States and during his tenure there, he demonstrated a predominantly participative leadership style, shaped by his experience managing a hybrid team composed primarily of Generation Z employees in digital marketing and graphic design roles. His leadership approach centered on collaborative planning, shared decision-making and flexibility in how tasks and responsibilities were distributed across the team which reflects the inclusive values of shared leadership models. His preferred method of decision-making was discussion-based. Rather than issuing instructions, he initiated team dialogues to explore alternative solutions and refine ideas collectively. He explained: *“I like to kind of leave it open to a discussion where I would come in with an idea and we would spend the next 30 - 45 minutes thinking of alternatives.”*

Notably, Participant 5’s early leadership approach was shaped by prior negative experiences with passive managers with one who even said: *“Have you tried using ChatGPT for an answer first before coming to me?”* This comment from a former supervisor prompted him to become more present and responsive with his own team. He added: *“I try to be very available for them, I try to always answer their questions. I try to be encouraging of them reaching out to me.”* Thus, his leadership evolution was grounded in self-reflection and a desire to offer more support and engagement than he once received. This demonstrates how social learning, as highlighted by Ziegert and Dust (2020) and recognition, a key motivator from Herzberg’s theory as highlighted by Ybañez (2024), can influence leadership behaviors.

Similarly, Participant 7, born in 1994, displayed a predominantly democratic leadership style, shaped by her 3-year stint as a Team Manager in the Customer Service Department during her stint at a forex company in Singapore. Working in a hybrid environment, she led a team of five, including approximately three Generation Z employees. Her leadership emphasized participatory decision-making, especially in matters related to employee welfare, flexibility and adapting to remote work challenges. She described her leadership as democratic: *“My leadership style is more of a democratic leadership style whereby before coming to a decision, I’ll actually either speak to the members involved individually. Or sometimes, I will just straight away discuss the issue with the team and ask for like a small voting.”* Her use of voting and consultations before decisions also mirrors shared leadership principles and aligns with Generation Z’s expectation for inclusion and voice, as highlighted in Generational Work Theory (Sun, 2024).

5.1.1.1 Generation Z vs. Older Generation Management Styles

On hindsight, though all participants managed multi-generational teams, their approaches to generational differences varied. Participant 3 observed that younger employees were better at adapting to new systems, while older staff required more support as they were not too *“tech-savvy”*. In addition, she explained that Generation Z staff *“prefer task-based autonomy over time-based micromanagement”* and are more likely to seek understanding behind decisions. This again supports the Generational Work Theory as stressed by Sun (2024) that this cohort value independence, purpose and rationale. Furthermore, it also connects with Herzberg’s motivator

factors, particularly autonomy and meaningful work which Zhou and Ma (2024) highlighted. In contrast, older employees were described as more resilient under pressure, less likely to leave during challenging periods and more focused on job security.

To bridge these gaps, Participant 3 organized team-building activities like go-karting and barbecues to foster interdepartmental empathy and understanding: *“They will know each other and the struggles that each department face instead of pointing fingers.”* She also stepped in when roles overlapped: *“I will step in to assign tasks,”* ensuring clarity and preventing conflict. These efforts support the development of both Team-Member Exchange, by enhancing peer relationships and mutual understanding across teams (Ge et al., 2024) and Leader-Member Exchange, by reinforcing the leader’s role in maintaining clarity and trust through proactive support (Georgiadou et al. 2025; Lu et al., 2024).

Participant 5 on the other hand, observed that Generation Z employees were self-motivated, eager to upskill and often researched job-related content in their own time. He contrasted this with older team members, who were more independent, relied on experience and worked toward longer-term goals. These generational differences informed how he varied his leadership involvement, providing closer support for younger staff while allowing senior team members more autonomy. As a result, this tailored approach reflects high-quality Leader-Member Exchange which authors Lu et al., 2024 mention as where leader-employee relationships vary in depth depending on needs and trust.

Conversely, when it comes to older employees, Participant 6 observed that this group accepted hierarchy more readily and were less reactive to job challenges. She described distinct differences in how she engaged with Generation Z employees compared to older staff. Generation Z employees were perceived as highly opinionated, independent and resistant to directive leadership. Her comments affirm the need for participative and shared leadership styles in managing younger employees. To manage this, she emphasized the need for involvement and transparency: *“Generation Zs are very opinionated. You can’t just say ‘do this.’ You need to involve them, or they’ll resist. But if you engage them, they bring fresh ideas.”* Her strategy with younger staff centered on participatory leadership, collaborative planning and open communication. She viewed their input as a resource and tailored her style to encourage innovation and engagement. At the same time, she also viewed this model not only as a planning tool but also as a way to observe employee performance and engagement levels: *“This will be the chance to gauge the endurance, the performance and the capability of each of your staff.”* Her framing of collaboration as a way to assess performance also resonates with Social Exchange Theory, where trust and reciprocity drive deeper engagement (Kim and Kim, 2024).

In contrast, Participant 7 noted significant differences in how Generation Z employees approached work compared to older generations. She described Generation Z team members as inexperienced but receptive, often likening them to a *“blank piece of paper.”* According to her, *“When they don’t have much experience, they are more of like whatever my boss tells me to do, I’ll just try my best to actually execute what is required according to my best understanding.”* Thus, she adjusted her delegation style accordingly, initially assigning responsibilities based on

individual comprehension and gradually building autonomy. Additionally, in her observations, Generation Zs may log in late during the day but they also compensate for it by logging in late in the middle of the night, after their shifts, to actually make sure that they close their case before the final deadline. However, she also noted their tendency to complete tasks last-minute, reflecting a more fluid approach to time management. On the other hand, older employees demonstrated a stronger adherence to conventional working hours and clear boundaries between work and personal time. She claims that they log in on the dot and start accepting and working on cases. Similarly, they log out on the dot once it's time to actually knock off. Authors Jasmine and Utomo (2024) and Fuchs et al. (2024) describe these generational differences as how cohorts prioritize work values such as flexibility, purpose and autonomy.

Participant 10 also adjusted his leadership based on generational preferences but focused more on rational communication and task clarity. He noted that Generation Z employees “*need to understand the rationale behind decisions*”, not just instructions”, prompting him to change how he communicated assignments. In addition, they are also very comfortable with digital tools but sometimes miss in-person mentorship. At the same time, he claimed that while older employees might struggle with technology at times, they tend to value boundaries more. He quoted: “*They preferred structure and separation between work and personal life*,” thus the need to balance those needs. This reflects the adaptive complexity required in hybrid, multigenerational teams, aligning with the description of how different generation cohorts prioritize their work values, highlighted by authors Jasmine and Utomo (2024) and Fuchs et al. (2024).

5.1.2 Employees’ Experience on their Manager’s Leadership Style

Table 9: Brief overview of employees’ quotes and initial codes on their managers’ leadership styles and preferences.

Data Excerpt	Initial Code
“He included me because he wanted me to get experience and know how it is done. I felt so valued because there were other qualified people who could have done that and he chose me. It made me feel proud of the family and feel some sense of belonging.” - <i>Participant 1</i>	Inclusive and Empowering Leadership
“What I prefer is the person gives the clear vision and also give the comments, what you should do better or not.” - <i>Participant 2</i>	Clear and Directive Leadership
“A good leader should know as in when they should take charge.” - <i>Participant 4</i>	Situational Leadership
“I’ve been given the chance to represent the organization... I’ve not experienced any negative effect from this.” - <i>Participant 8</i>	Inclusive Representation
“Great leadership is essentially considerate, empathetic leadership with the people in mind.” - <i>Participant 9</i>	Emphatic Leadership

Participants described a variety of experiences with their managers' leadership styles, offering insight into how these leadership dynamics were perceived across different team settings.

For instance, Participant 1, born in 1999 and working in the private sector for an audit firm in Ghana for 5 years, recalled how her manager made unilateral decisions without consultation or considering her inputs: *"You just make your own research and arrive at something. But, he might be like okay, no. This is how I want it to be done, so you should follow it that way."* This reflects a directive or autocratic style, which can limit engagement especially when relational exchange is low, a dynamic addressed by Leader-Member Exchange theory as highlighted by Lu et al. (2024) and Tang et al. (2023). For example, this lack of openness, she explained, discouraged her from contributing ideas and made her feel confined to executing someone else's vision, saying how the work was streamlined to someone's preference or taste instead.

Similarly, Participant 4, born in 2001 and employed at a private law firm within research and project-based departments for 11 months in Ghana, echoed this sentiment, describing autocratic leadership as creating *"a disconnect because you don't really see them as somebody who considers your opinion."* For instance, this lack of collaboration led to frustration, particularly when she was left out of team processes or decisions. She shared how being excluded from routine work activities, such as not being informed about court appearances was *"a bit annoying"* and *"kind of affects your day."* This aligns with findings in Social Exchange Theory as highlighted by Kim and Kim (2024), where exclusion from decisions undermines employee commitment.

Participant 8, born in 1999 and working for 1 year in the customer service department of a private money transfer company with offices in Ghana and the UK, also described the effects of overly rigid leadership. He stated that many leaders *"take the decisions and they expect you to just comply,"* a dynamic he found limiting. Although he expressed a willingness to adapt, saying: *"You get to understand your leader and then when your leader needs assistance, you just go to the aid of your leader,"* his remarks revealed the normalization of top-down structures that discourage open dialogue or initiative and how per Social Learning Theory as highlighted by Ziegert and Dust (2020), team members without titles often become passive in discussions and decisions. Despite adjusting to these conditions, he expressed a strong belief in the importance of structured leadership, emphasizing: *"If you're a leader and you're unable to plan all the affairs of the organization, then I see you not to be a good leader"* adding: *"Leaders direct. Leaders plan, control, lead and direct."*

Participant 2, born in 1997 and with 5 years of experience in the Swedish government sector, offered a different kind of detachment from leadership. While his work environment was characterized by consultation and participatory decision-making, he personally expressed reluctance to take on leadership roles due to the associated demands: *"I don't wish to be involved in leadership because it's too much work and it puts a lot of pressure."* Nonetheless, he noted that decisions in their team were rarely imposed from above, stating: *"It's mostly research and development, so they will have to consult with me before something like that."* His account on this also reflects elements of shared leadership, where mutual influence supports autonomy.

In contrast, participants shared more positive experiences with leaders who provided guidance while allowing autonomy. Participant 1 recalled a former manager who said: *“Just go and draft it and let me see how best you can do it.”* This approach helped her grow in confidence where she claimed that it personally helped her to go and stand out and make bold decisions, echoing Herzberg’s motivator factors like responsibility and growth as outlined by Ybañez (2024). She described this manager as someone who knew how to guide and delegate work and assist you to get the result that he intended to achieve, attributing it to the fact that a team should have the same goals.

Similarly, Participant 4 also highlighted a positive leadership experience which was marked by emotional intelligence, support and consideration for work-life balance. She explained that one of the main reasons she accepted her current law firm position was due to the way leaders managed their professional and personal responsibilities: *“They had a way of balancing work with personal life.”* Furthermore, she appreciated leaders who offered hands-on guidance, saying they would *“guide me with the researches they give me.”* To her, she stresses that: *“a good leader should know as in when they should take charge.”* These remarks highlight the value she places on mentorship and supportive supervision especially in research-driven environments and reflects high-quality Leader-Member Exchange, where leaders are attuned to employees’ personal and professional needs, highlighted by Lu et al. (2024).

Participant 1 further described a moment when she was asked to submit her team’s financial statements: *“I felt so valued because I felt like there were other qualified people who could have done that and he chose me. It made me feel proud of the family and some sense of belonging.”* This act of responsibility reinforced her sense of competence and commitment to the team. Likewise, aligning with Ybañez’s (2024) research with recognition as a motivator, Participant 8 also recalled a previous positive experience at a former workplace, where he was publicly recognized for voluntarily assisting colleagues: *“I was named best for the month... It was motivating.”* He was also entrusted and involved in decisions, such as representing the organization externally in a PR (Public Relations) capacity, which he accepted positively and said: *“I’ve been given the chance to represent the organization... I’ve not experienced any negative effect from this.”*

Survey responses from the questionnaire reflected similar themes regarding leadership styles experienced by Generation Z employees in hybrid teams, complementing the detailed personal accounts shared earlier. When participants were asked, *“How would you describe the leadership style you have experienced in your team(s)?”*, the majority of 59% of the respondents indicated that 1 person usually directs the team and makes most decisions. However, around 22% of the respondents reported that responsibilities and decision-making are generally shared among team members, while others described a more flexible approach, explaining that sometimes 1 person leads and other times the team shares responsibility. Only a smaller group, about 6% of the total sample, noted that leadership roles or responsibilities were not clearly defined. Notably, these 6% came exclusively from participants based in Sweden.

Building on this, participants were also asked, *“How has a team-based approach to leadership (or the lack of it) influenced your overall experience in hybrid teams?”* They were allowed to select all responses that applied to their experience. Many highlighted the benefits of collaborative leadership where half of the participants indicated that it *“improved communication and collaboration.”* Nearly as many also said it *“increased trust among team members,”* and close to half felt *“more engaged and included.”* These findings reflect the potential of shared leadership to enhance communication, trust and engagement in hybrid teams, core outcomes emphasized in Shared Leadership Theory (Ali and Yushi, 2024; Kim and Kim, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024; Ziegert and Dust, 2020). However, a few participants also acknowledged some challenges. An equal percentage of respondents, 4% each, noted that this approach *“created confusion or unclear roles,”* or *“didn’t notice a difference.”* This echoes some concerns also raised by Ji et al. (2024) about unclear boundaries in shared leadership settings. Additionally, about 34% of the total respondents indicated they *“haven’t experienced this approach”* in their teams. Only 1 participant each from China, Germany, India and the Philippines, as well as 2 from Singapore and 3 from Sweden, selected this response about not having experienced this approach.

5.1.2.2 Employees’ Leadership Preference Styles

Employees expressed a strong preference for leadership that balances guidance with autonomy, emotional intelligence and participatory decision-making. For many, the difference between feeling empowered and feeling stifled hinged on whether their input was sought or dismissed.

For instance, Participant 1 emphasized the need for balance: *“You need to be in between, not too hard and not too soft,”* Meanwhile, Participant 4’s preferred leadership style leaned toward a balanced and flexible approach. She advocated for leaders who are capable of adapting their behavior depending on the situation, stating that: *“a good leader knows as in when they should take charge.”* She did not dismiss directive leadership entirely but emphasized that its effectiveness depends on timing and context, paired with an openness to team input. This mirrors recent theory on blended leadership models as highlighted by Abson et al. (2024), combining directive and participatory elements as conditions evolve. Similarly, Participant 9, born in 2002 and working in the public sector for 4 years in Ghana, agreed. Although she did not express a strict preference for either directive or participatory leadership styles, she advocated for flexibility based on context, stating: *“One style approach- I think combination of the two depending on what’s the situation or event is, is the better approach.”*

Participant 2, although reluctant to assume a leadership role themselves, had clear expectations regarding effective leadership. He emphasized the need for clarity, direction and continuous feedback: *“What I prefer is the person gives the clear vision and also give the comments, what you should do better or not.”* This approach was described as *“helpful and motivating, particularly in a research-oriented context.”* While not overtly focused on flexibility, his responses highlighted a preference for structured, supportive leadership that fosters clarity and recognition without overwhelming pressure, aligning with McGregor’s Theory.

Participant 8 also contributed insights into his preferred leadership style where he expressed a distinct preference for participatory leadership, explaining: *“Since you share your idea, at least you also give your best other than having a decision being imposed to you.”* He believed that shared decision-making led to stronger commitment and better output and his view highlights social exchange dynamics where inclusion in decisions increases commitment and effort (Kim and Kim, 2024).

In addition to preferences for flexibility, balance and inclusivity, several participants also appreciated emotionally intelligent and considerate leadership. Participant 9 praised her current public sector manager as someone who does not act selfishly but acts as a *“servant leader”* who is *“very empathetic towards follower needs,” “open to listening”* and *“takes criticism quite well.”* A key example she offered involved scheduling around her bar exam. In a past situation, she was not consulted about her workload, which left her feeling *“demoralized.”* She described working in that period as *“like you're doing it from a place of pain.”* In contrast, a more recent experience where her manager proactively engaged her in a conversation about workload and leave was seen as a positive shift: *“I think that's considered leadership.”* She further reiterates that *“great leadership is essentially considerate, empathetic leadership with the people in mind,”* highlighting the difference this consideration made to her morale and productivity. These reflections highlight Lu et al.'s (2024) and Tang et al.'s (2023) research on the contrast between low-quality Leader-Member Exchange characterized by limited communication as well as lack of consideration and high-quality Leader-Member Exchange where mutual respect, support and open dialogue enhance morale and productivity.

There was also a strong generational awareness among the participants. Participant 1 advocated for greater inclusion of her generation in leadership and decision-making. As she quotes: *“Giving opportunities to us Generation Zs is what we actually pray for. We want to act in a certain way which we believe is not like the norm.”* She noted that Generation Z tends to approach work differently, aiming to get work done swiftly and smarter but not harder, suggesting that their perspectives could add value in leadership contexts. Conversely, Participant 9 addressed stereotypes about her generation's work ethic, noting: *“They do a pretty good job especially with all the technology resources they have that they are able to use,”* adding that guidance and support are key to their effective contribution. These views from both participants align with Sun's (2024) research on Generational Work Theory about Generation Z's preference for autonomy, innovation and inclusive leadership shaped by their digital upbringing.

Survey responses from the questionnaire reflected similar themes. For instance, the survey captured specific leadership-related factors that Generation Z employees identified as most motivating in a hybrid team. The top 3 selections included clear communication, mutual trust and respect as well as a tie between recognition and feedback and also transparency in decision-making. Conversely, participants also identified micromanagement or lack of trust, lack of communication and unfair or opaque decision-making as the 3 key factors that reduced their motivation in hybrid settings.

In addition, when asked which team leadership practices help them stay motivated, connected and effective in their roles, the most commonly selected option was *“open and transparent communication.”* This was followed by a tie between being *“trusted to lead tasks”* and having *“flexibility and autonomy”* in how they work. *“Taking part in decisions that affect the team”* was also the 3rd key factor which was frequently noted. In addition, in response to what leadership strategies can help prevent doing only the bare minimum in hybrid teams, *“regular check-ins and communication”* were most commonly selected, followed by *“giving clear goals and expectations.”* *“Involving team members in decisions”* as well as *“encouraging peer support and teamwork”* also tied and appeared among the top 3 strategies.

Further supporting the preference for participatory leadership, 88% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: *“I am more motivated to contribute in a hybrid team where leadership is shared among all team members.”* Only 1 participant each from Singapore, India, China and Sweden responded neutrally. Likewise, 88% of participants also expressed confidence with the statement: *“I am confident in the potential of sharing responsibilities and decision-making to effectively address team challenges.”* Only 1 participant each from Singapore and India as well as 2 from Sweden were neutral in their responses to this statement.

Again, these survey’s insights align with Georgiadou et al.’s (2025) findings that Theory Y leadership which emphasizes trust, autonomy and participation, is especially vital in hybrid settings to support Generation Z’s motivation and prevent disengagement.

5.2 Communication in Hybrid Work

This section explores how communication is experienced and managed within hybrid work environments, drawing from both employee and employer perspectives across ten participants. The analysis is divided into two key subheadings: the first focuses on the practical aspects of communication strategies and structural challenges, while the second addresses emotional tone, feedback dynamics, and relational aspects of communication in distributed teams.

Two tables accompany this analysis to illustrate how key patterns emerged from the interview data. Table 10 presents selected excerpts from participant interviews alongside initial coding labels, offering insight into communication preferences, responsiveness and infrastructural challenges within hybrid teams. This table provides a snapshot of how digital tools and connectivity shape daily interactions and workflow across remote and in-person settings. Complementing this, Table 11 summarizes participants’ reflections on emotional tone, clarity, feedback practices and perceived psychological safety in virtual communication environments. These insights highlight the interpersonal dynamics and expectations that influence communication effectiveness in hybrid workplaces. Again, these tables are just a brief overview with further quotes and analysis explored in the main text.

5.2.1 Practical Communication Strategies and Challenges in Hybrid Teams

Table 10: Brief overview of participants’ quotes and initial codes on communication strategies and challenges in hybrid work settings.

Data Excerpt	Initial Code
“Communication in hybrid settings depends on the situation. For formal communication with my boss, I use email, but if I need a quick response, I use WhatsApp or call. The results are faster as compared to sending an email.” - <i>Participant 1</i>	Speed Preference
“WhatsApp for urgent matters.” - <i>Participant 2</i>	Urgency-Based Platform Preference
“When I was stuck, I felt less motivated because it was not working and I needed the guidance. I felt alone because my manager was working from home.” - <i>Participant 3</i>	Emotional Isolation Due to Delayed Feedback
“Sometimes I can’t attend meetings or reply immediately. It’s not that I’m avoiding work -the network just goes off.” - <i>Participant 4</i>	Infrastructure Barriers to Responsiveness
“You adapt to time zones, but it means sending something and waiting eight hours for a reply.” - <i>Participant 5</i>	Time Zone Coordination Challenges
“This work-from-home thing is a beautiful thing, especially for those with family commitments.” - <i>Participant 6</i>	Hybrid Flexibility and Work-Life Balance
“Sometimes you have people available, sometimes you don’t. You either go ahead and take a risk or wait and delay the whole process.” - <i>Participant 7</i>	Responsiveness vs Workflow Disruption
“WhatsApp is used all the time, even when off duty.” - <i>Participant 8</i>	Always-On Communication Expectation
“Sometimes you don’t talk all day, just send updates. It makes you feel like a task machine... you wonder did I do it wrong?” - <i>Participant 9</i>	Unacknowledged Communication and Emotional Uncertainty
“We can’t control everything, so we try to be consistent... Morning updates and task logs. If you leave it too informal, things fall through.” - <i>Participant 10</i>	Structured Consistency in Hybrid Communication

Participants provided a variety of views regarding how communication is managed in hybrid work environments, with a particular emphasis on the platforms employed and the problems encountered when relying on digital technologies. Many described WhatsApp as the preferred communication platform, especially for urgent or informal matters, while email remained the go-to for more formal exchanges. This distinction was often shaped by both generational preferences and practical needs.

As Participant 1 explained, “*Communication in hybrid settings depends on the situation. For formal communication with my boss, I use email, but if I need a quick response, I use WhatsApp*

or call. The results are faster as compared to sending an email.” This sentiment was echoed by Participant 2, who shared that while email was part of daily routines, “*WhatsApp for urgent matters*” when quick decision-making or guidance was needed. For these participants, hybrid work demanded quicker, more flexible exchanges that traditional tools like email often failed to deliver. Adding to this, Participant 8, who works in a 24/7 customer service environment, described the continuous nature of hybrid communication: “*Communication is frequent, described as “all the time” due to our rotating shifts. WhatsApp is used not just during shifts, but even off-duty if needed.*” This quote reflects not only the operational demands of constant communication but also the evolving expectations of availability across different roles. This corresponds with Ge et al. (2024), who note that high-quality Team-Member Exchange is sustained through timely, intentional communication in hybrid contexts.

However, not all participants experienced communication as smooth or reliable. Participant 4 reported frequent interruptions due to poor internet connectivity and power outages: “*Sometimes I can’t attend meetings or respond on time, not because I don’t want to but because the power goes out or the Wi-Fi is unstable. That makes it hard for people to know if I’m disengaged or just disconnected.*” These technical difficulties strained collaboration and trust by making it difficult to distinguish between preventable delays and unavoidable disruptions. A more introspective perspective was offered by Participant 3: “*When I was stuck, I felt less motivated because it was not working and I needed guidance. I felt alone because my manager was working from home and started much later in the day.*” This aligns with Awwad et al. (2022) and Katou et al. (2021), who identify infrastructural gaps and limited access to timely support as job demands that heighten stress and reduce engagement in hybrid work environments, as outlined in the Job Demands-Resources Model.

Additionally, Participant 5 who worked in a graphic design space asserted that time zone differences further complicated communication. As mentioned, “*Sometimes when we send something, we only get a reply many hours later. So, we’ve learned to stagger our communication; WhatsApp for urgency, Zoom for collaboration, email for reference. You adapt, but it slows things down.*” This complication in communication underscores Kim and Kim’s (2024) stance that delayed responses disrupt the reciprocity required to maintain workflow continuity in hybrid teams.

Moreover, Participant 7 also shared how coordination was impacted: “*It’s hard when you need to make a decision as a team but three people are online and the others are either asleep or not yet on shift. You end up making half-decisions and waiting again.*” These inefficiencies align with Ge et al.’s (2024) Team-Member Exchange Theory, where fragmented availability disrupts shared leadership and collective problem-solving in hybrid teams. Interestingly, from an employer’s perspective, Participant 6 acknowledged generational differences in expectations, noting: “*This work from home thing is a beautiful thing... especially for those with family commitments. But younger employees expect availability. If you don’t answer fast, they feel ignored.*” These differences in generational expectations align with Jasmine and Utomo’s (2024) findings that Generation Z’s digital-native upbringing shapes their expectations for immediacy, clashing with traditional response norms in hybrid environments.

In contrast, from another employer, Participant 10 emphasized structure over spontaneity, sharing: *“We can’t control everything, so we try to be consistent... Morning updates and task logs. If you leave it too informal, things fall through.”* He explained that he sends daily task reminders when necessary and that his team uses shared documents for some assignments to track ongoing work which prevents task duplication. This approach suggests that communication discipline and consistency are valued as counterweights to the fluidity of hybrid work. This resonates with Awwad et al. (2022), who argue that when job resources such as task clarity and workflow systems are in place, they help employees manage hybrid demands more effectively reducing ambiguity and promoting sustained engagement, as demonstrated here through structured coordination strategies.

Also, Participant 9 described the psychological toll of one-way digital communication. She recounted a previous experience where she submitted multiple reports over email but received no response from her manager for days. This lack of feedback led her to question the quality of her work and contributed to feelings of isolation and demotivation. For her, the absence of acknowledgment turned communication into a transactional loop, where the relational and affirmational elements were missing. The silence, though perhaps unintentional on the manager’s part, left her feeling invisible and anxious. She explained: *“Sometimes you don’t talk all day, just send updates. It makes you feel like a task machine. You don’t even know if your manager saw it unless they reply. And if they don’t, you wonder - did I do it wrong?”* This reflects Fernández et al. (2023) who note that when digital communication lacks responsiveness and interpersonal cues, it weakens trust and disrupts the social exchange process in virtual settings.

Building on these qualitative reflections, survey data revealed that a majority of 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their team members communicate effectively and transparently in hybrid environments. This supports interview responses that emphasize the importance of structure, tool selection and responsiveness in fostering clear communication. Likewise, more than half of participants confirmed to *“strongly agree or agree”* on *“I feel at ease sharing my thoughts and concerns with my hybrid team”* when asked. This emphasizes the role of emotional safety in team engagement. In line with these perceptions, a greater percentage of the respondents from the survey indicated that they worked outside the traditional office setting several times a week. Suggesting that hybrid flexibility continues to be valued, particularly when supported by consistent and effective communication. This also aligns with Ge et al. (2024), who emphasize that high-quality Team-Member Exchange in hybrid teams enhances openness, shared responsibility and trust. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2024) associate well-structured communication practices with stronger team cohesion and increased engagement in distributed work environments.

5.2.2 Responsiveness, Leadership Accessibility and Workflow

Table 11: Brief overview of participants’ quotes and initial codes related to responsiveness, leadership accessibility, and workflow communication issues in hybrid work settings.

Data Excerpt	Initial Code
“With regards to the hybrid work especially when you are working from home, you are working under no supervision.” - <i>Participant 1</i>	Perceived Visibility
“The willingness to speak up is heavily influenced by the manager’s personality... someone too cold or distant makes it harder.” - <i>Participant 2</i>	Leader Personality and Feedback Comfort
“When you start to do hybrid working, you need to wait for answers. And sometimes waiting is annoying.” - <i>Participant 3</i>	Delay-Included Frustration
“Clear and timely communication is crucial, especially in hybrid environments.” - <i>Participant 4</i>	Importance of Clarity in Hybrid Communication
“Sometimes they nod, but you can tell they’re not really present. You have to call out to them more often than before.” - <i>Participant 5</i>	Needs Prompting
“When leaders delay feedback or keep things vague, it makes people think twice about speaking up.” - <i>Participant 6</i>	Impact of Delayed Feedback
“The lack of quick responses made me question whether people were multitasking or simply not interested in joining the conversation.” - <i>Participant 7</i>	Delayed Response
“We update on WhatsApp all the time, even off duty, but sometimes no one replies, it feels one-sided.” - <i>Participant 8</i>	One-Way Communication
“Even when the team encouraged openness, I sometimes ‘tiptoe around’ sensitive topics depending on the manager’s disposition.” - <i>Participant 9</i>	Cautious Feedback Behavior
“I try to model transparency. I share updates from upper management... I admit mistakes when they happen.” - <i>Participant 10</i>	Transparent Leadership Style

In addition to practical considerations, participants also spoke at length about the emotional and relational aspects of communication in hybrid teams. While digital tools enabled efficiency, they often lacked the emotional resonance found in in-person interactions.

Participant 4 emphasized that “*clear and timely communication is crucial, especially in hybrid environments,*” underlining how clarity serves as a foundation for trust when working remotely. Yet for others, the clarity of the message alone was not sufficient; the tone and manner in which it was conveyed played an equally important role. For instance, Participant 6 highlighted that communication must go beyond just delivering instructions, stressing that “*you can’t just tell them what to do and disappear,*” referencing a time where she was given a complex research assignment via email, but with no opportunity to clarify expectations or receive feedback along the way. This highlights that in hybrid settings, inconsistent or emotionally disconnected communication can be just as demotivating as unclear messaging. This corresponds with Kim

and Kim (2024), who emphasize that effective communication in virtual teams must integrate both clarity and emotional presence to maintain trust and engagement.

Additionally, the personality and responsiveness of leaders also influenced how comfortable participants felt sharing feedback. As Participant 2 observed, *“The willingness to speak up is heavily influenced by the manager’s personality... someone too cold or distant makes it harder.”* In the same way, Participant 9 explained that even in teams that claimed to support open communication, some topics required caution: *“I sometimes ‘tiptoe around’ sensitive topics depending on the manager’s disposition.”* She recounted a situation where she needed to ask for time off but hesitated because her previous supervisor had reacted negatively to similar requests in the past. Thus, she is very careful with how she approaches topics with her supervisors now, as she does not want to experience the same kind of reaction again. These responses indicate that psychological safety is not just built through policy or intent, but through daily tone and relational consistency. These connect with Lu et al. (2024), who describe how relational comfort and trust depend on consistent and supportive leader-member interactions. In parallel, Kim and Kim (2024) point to the role of emotional responsiveness in sustaining open communication within hybrid environments.

Participant 1 also offered a practical reflection on the challenges of leadership accessibility in hybrid settings, particularly when working without direct supervision. She explained, *“With regards to the hybrid work, especially when you are working from home, you are working under no supervision.”* She further went on to describe scenarios where urgent tasks had to be completed quickly, but without a manager’s real-time awareness. *“Your line manager isn’t there to see what you’re doing in real time. If they later check the system and find several pending tasks, they might assume you’re just at home doing nothing.”*

Participant 3 reflected more critically on the effects of those delays: *“When you start to do hybrid working, you need to wait for answers. And sometimes waiting is annoying.”* This sense of stalled workflow underscores how asynchronous communication can erode motivation. On the other hand, Participant 10 described efforts to foster an open communication culture: *“We’ve put a lot of work into building psychological safety, where people feel they can speak openly.”* This participant elaborated on practices like sharing personal challenges, providing space for transparency and admitting mistakes openly: *“I try to model transparency. I share updates from upper management, I admit mistakes when they happen and I give space for others to share their views.”* Such strategies appeared to make a difference. These small but intentional practices were not seen as extra work but necessary for maintaining connection. In fact, Participant 10 stated, *“You need to reach out, ask more questions and create space for reflection. That’s not extra work, it’s part of the job now.”* Taken together, these three perspectives point to the dual importance of responsiveness, emotional presence and relational openness in hybrid teams. Lu et al. (2024) highlight how leadership visibility and consistent support shape employees' perceptions of fairness and trust in remote settings. Similarly, Kim and Kim (2024) underscore that timely engagement and psychological safety are critical resources for sustaining motivation and communication in distributed work environments.

Participant 5 echoed this sentiment from a leadership perspective, noting that: *“sometimes they nod, but you can tell they’re not really present. You have to call out to them more often than before.”* This experience emphasized the need for more intentional follow-up in hybrid settings to maintain engagement. However, Participant 6 offered a caution about delayed or unclear leadership responses, stating, *“When leaders delay feedback or keep things vague, it makes people think twice about speaking up.”* This suggests that leader responsiveness directly affects psychological safety and willingness to contribute. This reflects Ge et al. (2024) and Lu et al. (2024) on how leader responsiveness and communication clarity directly shape psychological safety and employees’ willingness to contribute in hybrid work environments.

Participant 8, operating in a shift-based system, described persistent communication demands via WhatsApp, stating, *“We update on WhatsApp all the time, even off duty, but sometimes no one replies, it feels one-sided.”* The lack of reciprocal interaction diminished the sense of being heard, even when communication was technically happening. This aligns with the observation of Abson et al. (2024) and Ge et al. (2024) on how unbalanced or non-reciprocal communication weakens trust and reduces perceived team connectedness in hybrid environments.

Yet, despite these efforts, hybrid communication often failed to fully convey other cues. This was also reflected in Participant 7’s experience, particularly around meeting participation and responsiveness. She noted, *“The lack of quick responses made me question whether people were multitasking or simply not interested in joining the conversation.”* This kind of delayed or inconsistent participation made it difficult to maintain momentum or foster meaningful interaction. Even when present, some team members appeared disengaged choosing not to contribute when invited or remaining passive during discussions. These behaviors were not only seen as disengagement but also as signs of underlying emotional distance. This reflects Kim and Kim (2024) and Zhou et al. (2024) on how reduced emotional cues and slow responsiveness in hybrid settings contribute to perceived disengagement and hinder relational connection.

To complement the interview insights, survey results provided further clarity on communication and leadership accessibility in hybrid teams. When asked, *“To what extent is decision-making clearly communicated in your hybrid team?”*, more than half selected *“Very Clear,”* and notably, none selected *“Unclear”* or *“Very Unclear.”* This indicates that despite the limitations of digital communication, most team members perceive decision-making processes as effectively communicated. These findings support Participant 4’s emphasis on clarity as a foundation of hybrid collaboration and align with Participant 10’s structured approach to leadership communication.

Similarly, the majority of participants 56% strongly agreed and 25% agreed with the statement, *“When I face challenges, I receive prompt assistance from my hybrid team members, without relying on a formal leader.”* This illustrates that timely support often comes from peers rather than formal leadership, reinforcing the role of mutual engagement and shared responsibility in hybrid teams. The finding aligns with Participant 10’s focus on building psychological safety and Participant 9’s recognition of cautious yet supportive peer interactions. These results underscore that while leadership visibility matters, responsiveness from the broader team significantly

contributes to workflow continuity and emotional security. This reflects Abson et al. (2024) and Ge et al. (2024) on how high-quality Team-Member Exchange and peer responsiveness strengthen cohesion, reduce dependence on formal authority and enhance emotional security in hybrid work environments.

5.3 Motivation and Engagement of Generation Z

This section provides a comprehensive overview of how motivation and engagement are experienced, observed and supported in hybrid work environments, particularly among Generation Z employees. It is structured around three interrelated perspectives: how employers perceive shifts in employee engagement, how they respond through various leadership strategies and how employees themselves reflect on what motivates them and fosters their engagement at work.

Three tables accompany this analysis to illustrate how key patterns emerged from the interview data. Table 12 presents selected excerpts from employer interviews highlighting observed changes in Generation Z employees' motivation and participation. Whereas Table 13 focuses on leadership strategies used by employers to address and support engagement. In addition, Table 14 summarizes employee reflections on engagement, revealing that trust, feedback, autonomy and emotional safety are key factors in how they define and experience meaningful connection to their work. However, these tables are just a brief overview, with more examples of quotes from participants discussed in the main text.

5.3.1 Observing Changes in Employee Attitude

Table 12: Brief Overview of employers' quotes and initial codes related to observed signs of disengagement and attitude shifts among Generation Z employees in hybrid work settings.

Data Excerpt	Initial Code
"The camera stays off, the mic stays muted and when asked to contribute, it's minimal." - Participant 3	Minimal Contribution in Virtual Meetings
"They struggle to stay focused when no one is around them. I see them lose track of time." - Participant 5	Difficulty Maintaining Focus Remotely
"They log in late and there's no urgency to reply unless they're called out." - Participant 6	Lack of Initiative without Direct Prompting
"Some Gen Z employees remained unresponsive unless addressed directly... often just smiling." - Participant 7	Signs of Disengagement in Virtual Meetings
"What I've noticed with younger employees is they're more likely to disengage silently, especially if they feel their concerns aren't being heard." - Participant 10	Silent Disengagement

Several employers interviewed noted distinct shifts in the behaviors and attitudes of Generation Z employees within hybrid work settings. These observations reflected a growing concern about the subtle signs of disengagement that often go unnoticed in virtual environments. The absence

of physical cues, reduced spontaneity in conversation and inconsistent responsiveness all shaped their perception of declining motivation.

According to Participant 7, *“Some Gen Z employees remained unresponsive unless addressed directly... often just smiling.”* Participant further elaborated that, during virtual meetings, when open-ended questions were asked, Generation Z team members would often stay silent unless prompted by name making it difficult to gauge their understanding or engagement. This seemingly minor behavior was interpreted as more than just shyness; it was often seen as a reluctance to contribute or a lack of connection to the task at hand. Similarly, the same participant shared frustration with collaborative decision-making, stating, *“Sometimes waiting is annoying. Like when you’re ready but others are not online, and you can’t proceed without them.”* highlighting the stalled momentum that results when active participation is lacking. This behavior aligns with Lu et al. (2024) and Tang et al. (2023), who describe how low-quality Leader-Member Exchange relationships are often associated with reduced responsiveness and limited employee engagement in virtual work settings.

Furthermore, the experience of Participant 10 echoed these concerns, particularly around communication silence. He says that he’s seen disengagement in all age groups and that the causes could vary including some examples like burnout, unclear roles and personal issues. However, he quoted *“What I’ve noticed with younger employees is they’re more likely to disengage silently, especially if they feel their concerns aren’t being heard.”* This mirrored Participant 3’s reflection that even when Generation Z team members appear engaged on the surface, their real involvement may be minimal: *“Sometimes you can’t really tell if they’re paying attention. It’s like they’re present but not engaged.”* Rather than being seen as one-off instances, these quiet reactions were understood as ongoing signs of disconnection and low engagement. This reflects the assertions of Abson et al. (2024) and Kim and Kim (2024), who connect silent disengagement to imbalanced exchanges within the framework of Social Exchange Theory.

These observations by employers raise the question of whether such signs of disengagement are noticed early enough to be addressed. Survey participants from the questionnaire were asked: *“My team leader notices when I’m becoming less engaged or motivated during virtual work.”* While many agreed, a notable portion of 22% of the respondents expressed either uncertainty or disagreement. Among those who did not feel noticed were 1 respondent each from Ghana, Sweden and Singapore, while neutral responses came from 1 respondent each in China and India, along with 2 respondents from Sweden. This suggests that although some leaders may be attuned to emotional withdrawal, others might overlook the subtle behaviors highlighted by employees. Furthermore, these insights also highlight the variability in leader awareness and the need for improved emotional attentiveness in virtual work environments. This corresponds with Leader-Member Exchange theory, which stresses the value of individualized attention and emotional responsiveness in sustaining engagement (Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Lu et al., 2024).

More critically, Participant 6 noted how motivation appeared conditional: *“They log in late and there’s no urgency to reply unless they’re called out.”* This observation points to a deeper issue of

accountability and initiative qualities that are harder to enforce in hybrid settings. Similarly, Participant 5 added, *“They struggle to stay focused when no one is around them. I see them lose track of time,”* describing how the absence of physical oversight could lead to lapses in productivity. Interestingly, multiple employers commented on how these signs weren’t always obvious but gradually developed. Participant 5 again mentioned, *“They don’t always take the initiative unless someone follows up.”* What may seem like minor lapses, a muted microphone, a delayed reply, cumulatively created an impression of disengagement. Also, Participant 3 reinforced this, explaining, *“The camera stays off, the mic stays muted and when asked to contribute, it’s minimal.”* These reflections mirror concerns raised by Ji et al. (2024) and Klasmeier et al. (2025), who highlight that role ambiguity and weak accountability structures in hybrid or distributed teams can undermine initiative, while Zhou et al. (2024) emphasize the need for trust and shared norms to maintain engagement under such conditions.

5.3.2 Addressing Engagement through Leadership

Table 13: Brief overview of employers’ quotes and initial codes illustrating leadership strategies used to address engagement and motivation among Generation Z employees in hybrid teams.

Data Excerpt	Initial Code
“Most times, there’s no feedback at all, even when you ask. You kind of feel like you’re talking into a void.” - <i>Participant 3</i>	One-way Communication
“I like to kind of leave it open to a discussion with the younger employees first before I direct anything.” - <i>Participant 5</i>	Collaborative Decision-Making
“They are more motivated when they feel heard. You can’t just tell them what to do and disappear.” - <i>Participant 6</i>	Listening-Driven Motivation
“They are not shy to voice out... we are open and also transparent in terms of communication.” - <i>Participant 7</i>	Open Communication Culture
“We now do biweekly informal check-ins, which were suggested by a younger team member.” - <i>Participant 10</i>	Regular Check-Ins

Across the interviews, employer participants consistently emphasized that leadership approaches must evolve to meet the unique engagement needs of Generation Z in hybrid work environments. Rather than relying on traditional command-and-control styles, many described a shift toward transparency, presence and shared decision-making strategies that they believed better supported younger employees' motivation and emotional investment.

Accordingly, Participant 5 captured this shift clearly, reflecting, *“We used to be more top-down, but now it’s about supporting rather than commanding especially with Gen Z.”* This view of leadership as facilitative rather than directive marked a common thread in several responses. Echoing this, the same participant emphasized involving Generation Z in decision-making: *“I like to kind of leave it open to a discussion with the younger employees first before I direct anything.”* These quotes demonstrate a rebalancing of power, where engagement begins with participation and autonomy, not orders. Not only that, Participant 10 also articulated this shift through deliberate engagement efforts: *“We now do biweekly informal check-ins, which were suggested by a younger team member.”* Such feedback loops are not just operational tactics but

they symbolize a commitment to dialogue. This transition from hierarchical to participatory leadership aligns with Shared Leadership Theory, which emphasizes distributed influence and collaborative decision-making (Ali et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). This also reflects the assumptions of McGregor’s Theory Y, where employees especially Generation Z are seen as self-motivated and capable of meaningful contribution when empowered (Bakoula and Galanakis, 2022; Jasmine and Utomo, 2024).

Indeed, other leaders emphasized the emotional dimensions of presence. For instance, Participant 7 observed, *“It’s about showing up consistently. Even if it’s online, they should feel that you’re present and listening.”* Here, engagement is not only about what is said, but how consistently leaders demonstrate attentiveness and availability. This is echoed by Participant 3, who described the experience of disengagement during virtual interactions as “talking into a void,” explaining: *“Most times, there’s no feedback at all, even when you ask. You kind of feel like you’re talking into a void.”* These insights suggest that surface-level signs of agreement are no longer sufficient, leadership requires reading between the lines and initiating check-ins before silence deepens. For Participant 6, the solution was simple but powerful; *“They are more motivated when they feel heard. You can’t just tell them what to do and disappear.”* The Participant further emphasized the importance of emotional sensitivity in leadership by stating *“When they have problems or make mistakes, please do not reprimand them in public. Sit down, work together to have a solution.”*

In brief, Participant 7 also underscored that with the right tone, younger employees are ready to engage; *“They are not shy to voice out. We are open and also transparent in terms of communication.”* These responses confirm that leadership behaviors from showing up to asking questions to creating safe spaces directly influence how Generation Z engages in their roles. Such behaviors are central to high-quality Leader-Member Exchange relationships, where trust, individual support and communication foster greater employee responsiveness (Lu et al., 2024; Ziegert and Dust, 2020). Moreover, these reflections also echo principles of Social Exchange Theory, which views emotional presence and reciprocal care as foundational to ongoing engagement and mutual commitment in hybrid teams (Abson et al., 2024; Kim and Kim., 2024).

5.3.3 Reflections on Engagement at Work

Table 14: Brief overview of employees’ quotes and initial codes related to how they define, experience and reflect on engagement in hybrid work settings.

Data Excerpt	Initial Code
“This mutual updating and support built trust and helped us stay engaged, even when we were not physically together.”- <i>Participant 1</i>	Peer Support and Collaborative Trust
“When my manager starts work much later, it leads to a loss of time and I feel less motivated.” - <i>Participant 2</i>	Delay-Driven Demotivation
“Clear and timely communication is crucial, especially in hybrid environments.” - <i>Participant 4</i>	Clarity as a Driver of Engagement

“I feel more engaged when I’m trusted to handle tasks without being micromanaged.” - <i>Participant 8</i>	Engagement Through Autonomy
“Communication needs to be consistent and transparent across multiple channels to avoid messages losing meaning.” - <i>Participant 9</i>	Cross-Channel Communication Consistency

Across participants, there was a clear desire to feel seen, respected and supported in ways that go beyond performance metrics. As Participant 1 highlighted, *“this mutual updating and support built trust and helped us stay engaged, even when we were not physically together.”* This view underscores how engagement is sustained not only by leadership, but also by the informal social bonds that hold distributed teams together.

From a slightly different angle, Participant 2 reflected on how delayed guidance from managers led to a drop in motivation: *“When my manager starts work much later, it leads to a loss of time and I feel less motivated.”* This comment captures how structural issues like unsynchronized schedules can chip away at motivation, especially when employees rely on leadership input to progress. At the same time, Participant 2 also highlighted how relationship quality make a difference in how feedback is given and received: *“I feel comfortable giving feedback to my manager or leader because we have a good relationship.”* Here, engagement is not just about autonomy but about the psychological safety that comes from feeling respected and understood. This aligns with Leader-Member Exchange Theory, which emphasizes the motivational value of high-quality relationships based on trust, support and communication (Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Lu et al., 2024).

For others, communication quality played a central role. As Participant 4 succinctly put it, *“Clear and timely communication is crucial, especially in hybrid environments,”* emphasizing that promptness and clarity are not merely operational concerns but key drivers of engagement. Consequently, this sentiment was echoed by Participant 9, who went on to stress the need for structured transparency: *“Communication needs to be consistent and transparent across multiple channels to avoid messages losing meaning.”* Engagement, in this context, is not only about feeling heard, but about ensuring that messages carry the intended weight across digital tools. This supports insights from Social Exchange Theory, which views communication and reciprocity as essential to fostering trust and commitment in hybrid teams (Abson et al., 2024; Kim and Kim, 2024).

Furthermore, trust emerged as another powerful theme for engagement. As Participant 9 asserted; *“The presence of trust creates a safe environment to share ideas, admit our mistakes, and ask for help without feeling judged.”* These statements reflect a clear understanding that engagement is sustained not just by task design, but by the emotional security of the work environment. Participant 8 summarized this well by stating, *“I feel more engaged when I’m trusted to handle tasks without being micromanaged.”* For many Generation Z employees, engagement is strongly linked to autonomy, not control. These insights are reinforced by Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory, where intrinsic motivators such as trust, responsibility and recognition are identified as key drivers of satisfaction (Daniels, 2023; Zhou and Ma, 2024).

However, survey responses provided an added layer of understanding to how Generation Z employees reflect on engagement within hybrid teams. While a majority over 80% reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with the responsibilities assigned to them, their reflections on what sustains or erodes that engagement revealed deeper dynamics. When asked *“Which of the following reason(s) could make you feel dissatisfied with your responsibilities at work?”*, the top three reasons selected were *“Tasks that don’t match skills or interest”*, *“Poor communication from the team leader”* and a tie between *“Limited opportunity to contribute or grow”* and *“Unequal workload distribution.”* These concerns reflect Participant 8’s emphasis that *“I feel more engaged when I’m trusted to handle tasks without being micromanaged”* and Participant 1’s remark that *“this mutual updating and support built trust and helped us stay engaged, even when we were not physically together.”* In this context, engagement is not simply about doing assigned work. This is about doing meaningful work, in an environment of trust, autonomy and clear communication. This reflects with the Job Demands Resources Model, which frames engagement as the result of balancing job resources like feedback, recognition and alignment with one’s interests (Awwad et al., 2022; Choudhury and Maupin, 2025).

Recognition also emerged as a central theme. In response to the statement *“My contributions are recognized and valued by my team members,”* 88% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed, suggesting that emotional validation remains crucial in shaping how Generation Z employees evaluate their sense of belonging. This insight complements Participant 9’s reflection that *“the presence of trust creates a safe environment to share ideas, admit our mistakes and ask for help without feeling judged.”* Furthermore, when asked *“How often do you take on responsibilities beyond your official role?”*, half of the respondents indicated doing so at least weekly, with 25% stating they do so daily. These findings strongly reflect the motivational dimension of Herzberg’s theory, where recognition and responsibility serve as core motivators of discretionary effort (Nickerson, 2025; Ybañez, 2024).

5.4 Trust in Hybrid Teams

This section explores other trust dynamics within hybrid teams by examining both employers’ and employees’ perspectives on trust challenges and experiences. It highlights how trust is built, maintained or strained when working across physical and virtual environments, considering some factors such as initiatives, communication, transparency, collaboration and accountability.

Two tables accompany this analysis to illustrate how key patterns emerged from the interview data. Table 15 presents selected excerpts from employer interviews alongside initial coding labels, illustrating how leaders perceive and address trust issues in hybrid work contexts. This table offers a snapshot of the challenges and strategies related to trust from the leadership viewpoint. Complementing this, Table 16 summarizes employees’ feedback on trust within hybrid teams, revealing their concerns, expectations and experiences. These employee perspectives shed light on the realities of trust from the workforce’s standpoint of Generation Zs. However, these tables are just a brief overview, with more examples of quotes from participants discussed in the main text.

5.4.1 Employer's Perspectives on Trust Challenges and Experiences

Table 15: Brief overview of employers' quotes and initial codes on trust challenges and experiences.

Data Excerpt	Initial Code
"People have become more emotionally sensitive. It's important to lead with empathy, especially when they are working from home and isolated." - <i>Participant 3</i>	Emotional Awareness
"We try to have check-ins, even informal ones, because when someone is working from home, you can't always tell if they are struggling unless you ask." - <i>Participant 5</i>	Proactive Communication
"When they trust you, they will do anything for you." - <i>Participant 6</i>	Foundation For Performance
"The challenges of working in a hybrid environment is that sometimes when people work remotely, they do not turn up for the meetings on time. So there's a trust issue... I can't see what they are doing." - <i>Participant 7</i>	Uncertainty Issues
"We encourage initiative, but of course, you can't always tell if they're progressing without seeing them. So follow-ups are more important now." - <i>Participant 10</i>	Soft Accountability

Across employer accounts, trust was described as a central concern in hybrid work environments, particularly in relation to reduced visibility, accountability gaps, emotional sensitivity and communication practices. These employers described specific changes they made to adapt to these emerging trust-related challenges, especially as physical presence could no longer be relied on as a basis for monitoring and engagement.

Participant 3 emphasized the emotional shifts she observed in staff following the COVID-19 pandemic. She noted that employees had become more emotionally reactive, particularly when working in isolation. This affected how trust had to be managed at a distance. She explained: *"People have become more emotionally sensitive. It's important to lead with empathy, especially when they are working from home and isolated."* Her response to this change was to integrate more empathy into her leadership approach, indicating a practical need to check in on staff well-being and understand the emotional pressures that may interfere with remote performance. Her adjustments included creating space for informal interaction and acknowledging the heightened emotional needs that emerged during extended periods of remote work. These reflections are consistent with Agarwal et al. (2024), Formica and Sfodera (2022), Georgiadou et al. (2025) and Jasmine and Utomo (2024), who emphasize empathetic leadership as a response to the emotional aftermath of the pandemic. Additionally, they also align with Georgiadou et al.'s (2025) framing of inclusive leadership as essential for maintaining psychological safety in hybrid environments.

Participant 5 also addressed the difficulty of detecting when employees were facing challenges while working from home. The lack of visual cues and casual office interactions made it harder to assess whether employees were coping, aligning with research by Buła et al. (2024) who also highlighted these limited face-to-face interactions. Participant 5 described how this limitation influenced his communication practices as: *"We try to have check-ins, even informal ones, because when someone is working from home, you can't always tell if they are struggling unless you ask."* His emphasis was on maintaining regular communication, not only for operational purposes but also to bridge the trust gap created by the physical distance. These informal check-ins were used as a way to proactively identify potential issues before they affected team output or morale, he said. This approach resonates with Leader-Member Exchange Theory, which authors Lu et al. (2024) and Tang et al. (2023) emphasizes the importance of building strong relationships between leaders and individual team members to prevent disengagement.

In addition, participant 6 framed trust as an essential part of employee motivation and described it as something that, once established, leads to commitment and increased effort. She stated: *"When they trust you, they will do anything for you."* Her leadership style included direct team involvement and open collaboration, aiming to build trust through inclusion. She illustrated this approach by saying: *"We always involve them, regardless of if I'm senior management, I will just want to brainstorm together as a team."* Furthermore, she noticed that younger employees, when trusted and gradually empowered, performed better: *"If I do notice that the executive or junior actually has the capability, I will definitely share some of the manager's role.. bit by bit."* For her, trust was reinforced by creating an environment where employees felt heard, valued and involved in shaping outcomes, regardless of rank. Together, these 3 statements reflect research showing that Generation Z responds well to leadership styles that promote transparency, mutual trust and involvement (Boyratz and Gilbert, 2024; Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Leslie et al., 2021).

In contrast, other employers highlighted difficulties in maintaining accountability when employees or employers were physically absent. Participant 7 described problems with remote meeting attendance and expressed frustration over the resulting uncertainty. She said: *"The challenges of working in a hybrid environment is that sometimes when people work remotely, they do not turn up for the meetings on time. So there's a trust issue- I can't see what they are doing."* She gave an example of how certain of her employees would give her certain excuses as to why they were late or failed to turn up for meetings which got her questioning if it was true if they kept happening frequently. Her account reflects how hybrid settings can erode the predictability of participation, which in turn raises doubts about commitment and productivity. The inability to observe work being done led to reliance on assumptions, which she described as problematic. This aligns with Klasmeier et al. (2025), who note that leaders' willingness to delegate authority depends on trust and constructive team engagement as without it, leaders may withhold autonomy, hindering shared leadership development.

However, at the same time, Participant 7 still equally described a strong sense of trust in her team's ability to manage tasks independently during her absence. Reflecting on a situation where she had to step away due to an emergency, she said: *"Even as a manager, when I have an emergency and I have to leave, I can just walk away from my work with ease, knowing my team*

members will continue to do the work.” Rather than relying on constant availability, her leadership approach fostered autonomy and reliability, ensuring the team could function effectively even when she was temporarily unavailable. This example mirrors the balance between autonomy and accountability described in Klasmeier et al. (2025) above where empowered teams are trusted to operate independently and also reflects Ziegert and Dust’s (2020) view on the importance of reliability in shared and remote leadership contexts.

Participant 10 raised a similar issue in regards to the challenge of evaluating progress without in-person interactions. He supported a model that encourages employee initiative but acknowledged its limitations in remote contexts. He stated: *“We encourage initiative, but of course, you can’t always tell if they’re progressing without seeing them. So follow-ups are more important now.”* His comment pointed to a shift in leadership behavior. One that necessitated more structured and intentional follow-ups to replace the informal cues and updates usually available in a shared physical workspace. Trust, in his view, was maintained through consistent communication and deliberate monitoring, rather than assuming progress in the absence of visual confirmation. This emphasis on ongoing engagement and communication also echoes the role of shared leadership in maintaining cohesion and collaboration in virtual environments as researched by Ali and Yushi (2024), Kim and Kim (2024), Zhou et al. (2024) and Ziegert and Dust (2020).

Survey data from the questionnaire provided further insight into trust dynamics within hybrid leadership. In response to the statement, *“I trust that my team leader has my best interests in mind when making decisions that affect our work,”* 72% of Generation Z employees surveyed strongly agreed or agreed, 22% were neutral and the remainder disagreed. Notably, neutral responses came from 1 respondent each in France, Malawi and China as well as 4 respondents from Sweden. Disagreement was limited to 1 respondent from Sweden and Thailand respectively.

5.4.2 Employee’s Perspectives on Trust Challenges and Experiences

Table 16: Brief overview of employees’ quotes and initial codes on trust challenges and experiences

Data Excerpt	Initial Code
“We had each other’s backs... We made sure that even if one person is absent, the web keeps on flowing irrespective of any of our absence.” - <i>Participant 1</i>	Mutual Team Support
“He trusted me enough to give me access early, which not everyone got.” - <i>Participant 2</i>	Trust as a Privilege
“People tend to distrust workers working from home because they don’t think we are actually doing the work. And that leads to a lot of micromanaging... which may not work well with Gen Z because that’s not giving them creative freedom.” - <i>Participant 4</i>	Micromanagement

“I swapped with someone and he didn’t come to complete the work... If you don’t take care, you’ll be blamed for someone’s irresponsibility.” - <i>Participant 8</i>	Accountability Issue
“The hybrid system makes you appreciate the moments you get to see your team. You’re not tired of each other. So when you meet again after some days apart, it’s refreshing and you work better together.” - <i>Participant 9</i>	Improved In-Person Collaboration

Beyond managerial viewpoints, employee accounts also provided examples of how trust was either fostered or challenged under hybrid conditions, particularly when it came to peer relationships and leadership gestures.

Participant 1 described a strong sense of mutual responsibility within her team, emphasizing how this collective mindset was essential to maintaining workflow. She noted: “*We had each other’s backs,*” illustrating a team dynamic rooted in support and accountability. This sense of mutual commitment extended into remote work, where the absence of physical presence did not disrupt operations. As she explained: “*We made sure that even if one person is absent, the web keeps on flowing irrespective of any of our absence.*” Consistent sharing of updates and task information among team members allowed them to maintain continuity, even during periods of remote collaboration. This reflects Team-Member Exchange Theory as researchers Ge et al., (2024) emphasizes high-quality peer relationships built on trust and shared responsibility. It also aligns with Social Exchange Theory, where reciprocal actions such as covering for each other reinforce cohesion, trust and mutual accountability (Kim and Kim, 2024).

Participant 2 shared a different yet related experience, highlighting the role of trust in gaining early access to a high-performance computing account. He reflected, “*He trusted me enough to give me access early, which not everyone got.*” This early access was not only a practical advantage but also a clear signal of his supervisor’s confidence in him. Moreover, he added that staying active on the system was necessary to retain access as he claims: “*If there is a one-week gap, then your connection will be gone.*” For him, this privilege was both a recognition of capability and a responsibility to remain engaged. This aligns with Mansoor et al. (2025) as early access signaled trust and recognition, reinforcing his sense of value. Furthermore, his need to stay active mirrors how empowerment fosters initiative, responsibility and team contribution.

Trust also emerged as a central theme in Participant 4’s account, particularly in relation to perceptions of remote work. She observed a common bias against employees working from home: “*People tend to distrust workers working from home because they don’t think we are actually doing the work.*” This skepticism, she explained, often led to excessive oversight: “*And that leads to a lot of micromanaging, which may not work well with Gen Z because that’s not giving them creative freedom.*” These 2 statements relates to McGregor’s Theory X as highlighted by Georgiadou et al. (2025), where distrust leads to over-control and micromanagement, often harming engagement. It also differs with the assumptions of Theory Y and shared leadership, which rely on mutual trust. Participant 4 also emphasized that for remote work to succeed, leaders must “*be able to trust that their team is going to deliver.*”

In contrast, Participant 8 recounted a breach of trust in a work exchange agreement that was not honored. He recalled, *“I swapped with someone and he didn’t come to complete the work... And if you don’t take care of it, you’ll be blamed for someone’s irresponsibility.”* As a result, he had to step in and complete the task himself, highlighting how the actions of one team member can disrupt others and how accountability may become uneven in hybrid teams. This breakdown exemplifies low-quality Team-Member Exchange highlighted by Ge et al. (2024), which can reduce openness, foster inequity in responsibility and weaken team trust. Additionally, it also reflects the Social Exchange Theory notion that failed reciprocity disrupts cohesion and productivity (Abson et al., 2024). Despite this negative experience, Participant 8 also emphasized that trust within a team is built through mutual respect and open communication, particularly when it comes to deadlines and unexpected issues.

Participant 9 on the other hand, reflected on how hybrid work affected her connection with colleagues, especially in terms of physical presence. She shared: *“The hybrid system makes you appreciate the moments you get to see your team.”* Rather than diminishing collaboration, these intermittent in-person interactions energized the team: *“You’re not tired of each other. So when you meet again after some days apart, it’s refreshing and you work better together.”* Her account points to the role of physical presence in reinforcing team spirit and collaboration. In addition, she also emphasized the importance of managerial trust and appreciation in hybrid settings. After stepping up to handle responsibilities during her manager’s absence, she described the response: *“When she came back, she was appreciative for nearly a week. I even received a cash reward from her to show her appreciation.”* The recognition went beyond material rewards but it reflected a deeper trust in her abilities. She concluded: *“She would not put me in that position unless it was extremely necessary,”* even acknowledging that the assignment itself was a sign of trust. The cash reward and verbal appreciation she received reflect both hygiene and motivator factors, with the trust placed in her aligning with recognition and responsibility. These are some key drivers of satisfaction and engagement according to Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory (Zhou and Ma, 2024).

Further supporting these qualitative reflections, our survey data from the questionnaire also revealed that an overwhelming 90% of Generation Z employees surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: *“I trust that my team members have my best interests in mind when making decisions that affect our work.”* Notably, only 2 respondents from Sweden and 1 from China reported a neutral stance, with no respondents disagreeing. This strong consensus affirms that beyond management-level trust, peer-level trust is also a cornerstone of positive hybrid team dynamics, echoing the lived experiences shared by participants in this study. This resonates with authors Ziegert and Dust (2020) who notes that when leadership models authenticity and collaboration, it sets the tone for trust-based peer interactions as reflected here in the high levels of mutual trust reported among Generation Z employees in hybrid teams.

6. Discussion

This section draws on both existing literature and the study's findings to reflect on how shared leadership, via the four sub-dimensions in the analytical model as shown in Figure 2, affects quiet quitting and employee engagement among Generation Z in hybrid teams.

6.1 Understanding Generation Z

Across interviews and survey responses, Generation Z employees consistently emphasized the importance of autonomy, recognition and meaningful contribution. Motivation increased when they were invited into planning discussions, trusted with initiative and recognized informally. These behaviors reflected a move away from rigid hierarchies toward relational trust and shared accountability. This shift aligns with Shared Leadership Theory, which Zhang et al. (2024) explains is one of the core strengths of shared leadership itself. The observed increase in motivation supports the view that when leadership is shared, individuals feel a stronger sense of purpose and commitment, as highlighted by the Social Exchange Theory (Abson et al., 2024; Kim and Kim, 2024; Mansoor et al., 2025). Moreover, rather than being driven solely by internal ambition or external rewards, motivation among Generation Z appeared deeply shaped by how leadership is distributed and how trust is operationalized within team dynamics. According to authors Kim and Kim (2024), this further reinforces that shared leadership functions not only as an organizational design but also as a psychological enabler of engagement. These patterns also reflect all four sub-dimensions of shared leadership under the analytical model presented in Figure 2, where trust, autonomy, recognition and collaboration contribute jointly to increased motivation and sustained engagement, particularly within the hybrid work environment in which these experiences are situated.

In addition, these preferences also echo Generational Work Theory highlighted by Ita (2025), which suggests that Generation Z employees value flatter organizational structures and authentic, trust-based leadership practices over command-and-control models. Aligning with research by Boyraz and Gilbert (2024), Jasmine and Utomo (2024) and Leslie et al. (2021), employers noted that Generation Z employees interacted with leadership differently than older colleagues, which may potentially imply a generational shift in how authority is perceived. This is also consistent with the study's findings, which suggest that leadership strategies should evolve to reflect generational norms around equity, participation and authenticity. For instance, these evolving norms reinforce the need for leadership that promotes trust through transparency, enables autonomy in decision-making, provides regular recognition of contributions and encourages collaboration through open dialogue (Ali and Yushi, 2024; Daniels, 2023; Kim and Kim, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). This highlights the importance of incorporating a generational perspective when applying shared leadership practices, as illustrated in the analytical model. By understanding how Generation Z interprets leadership through values such as equity, participation and authenticity, organizations can more effectively tailor their leadership strategies to sustain engagement and mitigate signs of disengagement, such as quiet quitting.

6.2 Collaboration

Yet, this evolving leadership preference also intersects with challenges in implementation. Despite the growing emphasis on participatory leadership in the literature (Ali and Yushi, 2024; Bakoula and Galanakis, 2022; Jasmine and Utomo, 2024; Mansoor et al., 2025; Rk, 2023) and in employer accounts from our interviews, responses from both employees and survey participants indicate that many hybrid teams still lack a clearly defined shared or collaborative leadership model. This structural ambiguity may partly explain the ambivalence expressed by some Generation Z employees and may potentially highlight that even well-intended leadership behaviors are not uniformly experienced or interpreted. Based on our interviews alone, most of the employees interviewed were based in Ghana while most employers interviewed were based in Singapore, suggesting that some of the ambiguity around shared leadership may be shaped by cultural differences in how leadership and participation are understood. For instance, some Ghanaian employees described a tendency to withhold input unless directly invited, reflecting expectations of hierarchy or caution in speaking up. This, according to Jasmine and Utomo (2024) and Liu-Lastres et al. (2023), may be seen as a form of strategic silence reflecting low psychological safety, due to sustained imbalances in the workplace. In contrast, several Singapore employers spoke about expecting greater initiative and openness from team members. Thus, these differing assumptions about voice and responsibility may possibly complicate how shared leadership is experienced in different cultures.

From the perspective of the analytical model, inconsistent collaboration and weak expressions of trust undermine the credibility of shared leadership and this interpretation aligns with Abson et al. (2024) and Kim and Kim (2024), who emphasize that trust and collaboration are foundational to sustaining shared leadership in virtual and hybrid contexts. These shortcomings, as noted by Buła et al. (2024) are problematic when exchanges are weak or uneven as evidenced in our findings and from the lens of Team-Member Exchange Theory, may undermine the components of collaboration, including mutual support, feedback sharing and interpersonal trust (Ge et al., 2024). This is particularly observed in hybrid environments, where limited face-to-face interaction already makes connections more fragile. Left unaddressed, such gaps can also lead to disengagement and may gradually contribute to quiet-quitting (Georgiadou et al., 2025; Liu-Lastres et al., 2023).

6.3 Autonomy

Importantly, based on our study, the increased emphasis on shared leadership and collaborative practices did not fully eliminate the relevance of traditional leadership structures. Instead, the study's findings suggest that the effectiveness of shared leadership is still contingent upon contextual factors such as task complexity and perceived risk. For instance, industrial differences played a significant role in shaping how autonomy was enacted across professional settings, where some participants working in the financial sectors observed that although shared leadership principles were encouraged during team activities like brainstorming and logistical planning, decision making around financial approvals or major expenditure remained tightly controlled by senior leaders. In such case, a more directive or authoritarian leadership approach resurfaced, underscoring the limits of shared leadership in high-staked contexts. Thus, this aligns

with Abson et al. (2024) who suggest that shared leadership is advantageous in complex, innovative or knowledge-intensive settings. This also highlights the need for leadership agility rather than fixed models as a critical aspect of sustaining performance and engagement, reframing Shared Leadership Theory as a context-responsive framework, aligning with developments in blended leadership models as discussed by the same authors.

In practical terms, this implies leaders must evaluate when to provide autonomy and when more directive support is necessary. This further suggests that the application of the four sub-dimensions of shared leadership, as outlined in the analytical model, may need to be adapted depending on hybrid work dynamics and the team's or individual's capacity for shared ownership.

6.4 Trust

Trust also emerged as a key moderator in how autonomy was experienced. While many employers viewed Generation Z employees as independent and resourceful, some also viewed them as overly cautious. From the employees' perspective, this caution stemmed from uncertainty about how their contributions would be received. These findings challenge traditional command-and-control leadership mindsets and emphasize the need for more relational and emotionally intelligent practices that align with generational expectations and the realities of hybrid work (Abson et al., 2024; Boyraz and Gilbert, 2024; Leslie et al., 2021). Within the analytical model, this interaction between trust and autonomy reflects a crucial internal loop that influences employee engagement. Without clear trust from leadership, autonomy can feel unsafe, leading to hesitation rather than proactive contribution. As Georgiadou et al. (2025) note, control-oriented approaches like McGregor's Theory X risk undermining autonomy and engagement in hybrid environments. Instead, leaders should foster psychological safety and openness, creating conditions that also support recognition and collaboration and which, as Bakoula and Galanakis (2022) note, are essential for sustaining intrinsic motivation among Generation Z.

6.5 Recognition

What's more, closely linked to trust, recognition and feedback also emerged as core motivators. Generation Z repeatedly emphasized that being acknowledged and appreciated sustained their commitment, especially in hybrid settings. Participants' survey data reinforced this, with many describing feeling seen by peers and often going beyond their formal roles. This underscores that for Generation Z participants in this study, emotional validation through feedback is not superficial but functions as a form of recognition and inclusion, which according to authors Nickerson (2025) and Ybañez (2024), it is this sense of being seen and valued that often drives their willingness to contribute beyond their formal responsibilities. In the absence of in-person interaction, recognition became even more essential to maintain trust and connection. When such signals were absent or inconsistent, emotional withdrawal and minimal effort followed. These findings, as supported by Zhou and Ma (2024), suggest that recognition in hybrid contexts plays a disproportionate role and that it must be intentionally fostered alongside trust, autonomy and collaboration to maintain the positive conditions described in the analytical model. As

recognition and inclusion decline, so too, does the quality of shared leadership and the likelihood of sustained engagement.

Likewise, the reciprocal dynamic of recognition also aligns with Social Exchange Theory, as Kim and Kim (2024) emphasize that employees tend to reciprocate emotional investment when they feel genuinely valued. Employers interviewed seemed aware of this pattern, observing greater engagement when they practiced inclusive behaviors such as informal check-ins, collaborative problem-solving and opportunities for junior staff to lead. These examples, supported by Abson et al. (2024) and Klasmeier et al. (2025), imply how trust and collaboration, when practiced authentically, may foster recognition and gradually expand autonomy, reinforcing the interconnected nature of the analytical model and its relevance to real-world engagement outcomes.

6.6 Employee Engagement

Interestingly, the study's findings subsequently show that although Generation Z respondents did not label their disengagement explicitly, their descriptions closely resembled "quiet quitting" as a gradual decline in discretionary effort and emotional energy. Employers observed similar signs such as reduced input, fewer cameras on during meetings and less spontaneous engagement. This aligns with Georgiadou et al. (2025), who argue that such behaviors represent a redefinition of the employee-work relationship rather than active defiance. In this light, quiet quitting can be interpreted as a silent feedback loop where leaders' emotional absence is mirrored by Generation Z employees' behavioral withdrawal. This further supports insights from Leader-Member Exchange Theory, where the absence of relational investment from leadership often leads employees to operate at the margins of engagement, fulfilling their roles functionally but without emotional or creative energy (Lu et al., 2024; Tang et al., 2023). This type of withdrawal often reflects a breakdown across several sub-dimensions of the analytical model, particularly trust and recognition. According to the same authors, when trust and recognition are compromised, collaboration weakens and autonomy diminishes, both of which are vital for sustained engagement. Our data also point to this dynamic, indicating that physical separation in hybrid environments often obscures early warning signs of disengagement, making these cycles harder to identify and interrupt in time.

This erosion of connection can be further understood through the emotional ambiguity of hybrid settings. When social connection weakens due to lacking real-time interactions, even manageable job demands can become demotivating. This aligns with the Job Demands-Resources model, which authors Awwad et al. (2022) and Katou et al. (2021) stressed. Moreover, the fact that some survey respondents were unsure whether their withdrawal would even be noticed underscores this gap in attentiveness. These findings suggest that in hybrid environments, emotional visibility is not automatic and must be actively cultivated through intentional communication and relational presence (Bula et al., 2024). Addressing this requires deliberate efforts from leaders to maintain trust and foster collaboration. Within the broader analytical model, this insight connects directly to the interplay between emotional visibility, perceived support and engagement outcomes. By systematically addressing each component, such as the

role of trust in leader and employee dynamics, the importance of proactive communication and the buffering effects of emotional presence on job demands, the model helps explain how intentional practices can disrupt disengagement patterns like quiet quitting and reinforce sustained employee engagement.

On another instance, some positive deviations also emerged where some teams maintained strong engagement with colleagues through peer support, regular check-ins with each other and shared responsibilities. The study's findings show that employees in these settings described greater cohesion and accountability, illustrating that engagement is not solely dependent on formal leadership but is also socially reinforced. This aligns with Social Learning Theory, as described by Ziegert and Dust (2020), where in these settings, this theory may also prove valuable not just as a framework for task distribution but as a model of relational attentiveness, since it enables early detection of withdrawal and fosters timely, informal responses. Furthermore, survey participants also largely agreed that they trusted both colleagues and managers to have their best interests in mind when making decisions that affect their work. This collective trust, paired with peer-led collaboration, helped reinforce recognition and sustain a sense of autonomy.

Overall, these examples show how the elements of the analytical model as shown in Figure 2, including shared leadership practices and its sub-dimensions of trust, autonomy, collaboration and recognition and ultimately the goal of employee engagement, may possibly emerge from both vertical and lateral interactions in hybrid teams. When practiced consistently, these elements might support shared ownership and contribute meaningfully to collective team goals, as emphasized by Ge et al. (2024). This may also help to reduce the likelihood of quiet quitting, possibly enabling hybrid teams to thrive. At the same time, several findings in this study extend the model's implications. Most notably, based on our observations, trust emerged as the most fragile yet central factor which often eroded not through conflict, but through silence and emotional absence. Recognition also proved to be disproportionately impactful, functioning more as emotional validation than formal feedback. Furthermore, collaboration appeared most effective when it involved early and genuine co-creation, rather than limited coordination. These findings may also suggest the notion that employee engagement in hybrid teams is not solely tied to task clarity or workload balance but may also be shaped by the quality of interpersonal dynamics and the perceived authenticity of leadership interactions. While these patterns do not contradict the model, it suggests areas where it may be further specified. For instance, although our sample is limited, these indications suggest that emotional presence and communication consistency may influence how the sub-dimensions of shared leadership are experienced and how they relate to quiet quitting.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how shared leadership, in contrast to traditional hierarchical leadership, influences quiet quitting among Generation Z employees in hybrid work environments. While the findings are based on a limited number of participants and are therefore

exploratory in nature, they offer meaningful insights into how leadership style may affect engagement and disengagement among younger employees.

In addressing the first research question, *“How does shared leadership, in comparison to traditional leadership, influence quiet quitting among Generation Z employees in hybrid work environments?”*, the study found that shared leadership, characterized by emotional presence, collaboration and mutual trust, tends to align more closely with Generation Z’s values and expectations. Participants emphasized the importance of autonomy, inclusivity and active involvement in decision making, pointing to a generational shift toward transparency, agency and purpose. Rather than acting as a rigid structure, shared leadership emerged as a relational model that fosters initiative, engagement and psychological safety. This is especially crucial in hybrid environments where physical distance can weaken trust and disrupt team cohesion. However, its success depends on intentional relational effort and the ability of leaders and team members to maintain clear communication, mutual accountability and shared responsibility.

Regarding the second research question, *“How can early signs of quiet quitting be detected and prevented through shared leadership practices to sustain employee engagement?”*, participants identified early indicators such as emotional withdrawal, reduced communication and passive participation. Practices like informal check ins, peer collaboration and co-created goals were seen as effective in addressing these signs and fostering a culture of attentiveness, where concerns are more likely to surface early. In this way, shared leadership can act as both a preventive and sustaining mechanism for engagement in hybrid environments.

However, one observation that emerged from the study relates to the role of cultural perceptions in shaping how leadership is understood. While this was not a comparative cultural study, the diversity within our participant sample revealed that expectations around communication, hierarchy and initiative are not experienced uniformly. These insights reinforce the importance of considering cultural context when applying shared leadership practices across hybrid or cross-national teams. Building on this, participants also acknowledged the need for balance. During periods of uncertainty or role ambiguity, they valued clear direction and defined expectations. This suggests that leadership approaches must remain flexible, blending collaboration with structure to meet evolving needs. The variation in experiences further reinforces that leadership is also not experienced uniformly and must be responsive to individual and situational differences. The findings also raise questions about whether current leadership development programs adequately prepare managers for the relational and situational demands of shared leadership. Without structural support, even well-intentioned efforts risk being perceived as inconsistent or ineffective, particularly in hybrid teams that require more deliberate trust building and clarity.

Ultimately to summarize, while this study does not claim to provide definitive answers, it contributes to the broader conversation about how leadership styles must evolve in response to generational shifts and changing work structures. By centering employee voice and emphasizing relational dynamics, the study offers a foundation for future research into more human centered leadership practices. While shared leadership shows promise, its effectiveness is not guaranteed

and depends on intentional implementation and contextual sensitivity. At the same time, this promise must be weighed against real-world challenges. This is because not all organizational cultures are equally receptive to shared models and the effectiveness of such approaches can vary significantly depending on team dynamics, leadership maturity and clarity of roles. Furthermore, while many participants resonated with collaborative leadership, their experiences were not uniform. This highlights the importance of recognizing diversity within Generation Z and avoiding overly generalized conclusions. These nuances emphasize that leadership interventions, even well-intentioned ones, must be adaptive and responsive to the specific needs and contexts of those involved. Thus, it is hoped that these insights serve as a springboard for further exploration into how organizations can sustain engagement, prevent quiet quitting and build resilient, inclusive workplace cultures.

7.1 Suggestions for Future Research

Building on the limitations and findings identified in this study, multiple directions for future research are proposed to enhance and expand knowledge of leadership dynamics and employee engagement among Generation Z in hybrid work settings.

Firstly, future studies could build on Shared Leadership Theory by exploring how it functions in complex, evolving team environments with Generation Z employees. Rather than revisiting traditional situational factors such as task complexity or urgency which are already well established in the leadership literatures, future research could shift toward understanding the relational and structural mechanisms that sustain shared leadership over time. This includes examining how teams manage conflict, role ambiguity or decision-making gridlock with Generation Z employees when leadership responsibility is distributed. Understanding how power is negotiated and accountability maintained in the absence of formal hierarchies could further strengthen the applicability of shared leadership in real-world, high-stakes environments.

In addition, future research could also focus on how heterogeneous teams can be effectively designed to support shared leadership particularly with Generation Z employees in hybrid environments. This includes identifying the self-leadership and interpersonal capabilities these individuals need to contribute effectively in the absence of rigid hierarchies and to prevent disengagement, confusion or phenomena like quiet quitting. Exploring how individual differences, prior experiences and organizational cultures shape responses to distributed leadership could help explain why shared approaches resonate more with some teams with Generation Z employees than others, helping to refine context-sensitive leadership models that better address the needs of diverse workforce segments.

Secondly, future studies would benefit from incorporating more in-person interviews that allow for the observation of non-verbal communication. This would enhance the depth and richness of qualitative insights, particularly when exploring emotionally charged topics such as disengagement, exclusion or recognition. Moreover, non-verbal cues including tone, gestures and posture can provide critical context that supports more nuanced interpretations of participants' experiences.

Thirdly, longitudinal research designs are encouraged to explore how shared leadership practices, engagement levels and team dynamics evolve over time. Conducting follow-up interviews or even repeated survey waves could capture shifts in motivation, trust and collaboration in response to organizational changes, leadership transitions or evolving hybrid work arrangements. Adopting this temporal perspective may offer meaningful insights into the durability and long-term effectiveness of leadership strategies designed for Generation Z.

Fourthly, subsequent studies should also strive to increase both the sample size and the demographic diversity of participants, including both employers and employees from various countries as well as from a broader range of industries, cultural contexts and organizational roles. This will help ensure a more globally representative understanding of shared leadership in hybrid settings. In addition, a larger, more varied dataset would not only increase the generalizability of findings but also surface patterns and exceptions that smaller samples may overlook. In particular, including participants from underrepresented sectors, such as non-profit organizations, start-ups or even creative industries could offer alternative perspectives on how leadership and engagement are experienced in less traditional work environments.

Furthermore, comparative studies that include multiple generational cohorts, such as Millennials or even others in the coming years, could offer important insights into intergenerational dynamics within hybrid teams. This would allow researchers to assess whether leadership preferences and engagement triggers differ significantly across age groups or whether certain practices resonate universally. Additionally, while this study included one Generation Z leader, their perspectives remain limited in the overall sample. A more deliberate inclusion of Generation Z leaders could yield unique insights into peer-led leadership, authenticity and the redefinition of authority in digital-era hybrid workplaces. Their perspectives could redefine what authority looks like in environments where influence is earned through credibility and innovation rather than tenure or title alone.

Finally, future studies may also consider the impact of organizational culture, sector or industry-specific norms and technology infrastructure in shaping how leadership is perceived and practiced. As hybrid work continues to evolve, these contextual factors may increasingly influence both leadership behavior and employee engagement.

7.2 Managerial Implications

This study contributes insights that may be of practical value to employers and human resource professionals seeking to foster stronger engagement among Generation Z employees in hybrid work settings. The following suggestions take into account the preferences, behaviors and needs of this generation within today's evolving work environments. As such, these implications can serve as useful guidance for adapting leadership practices, communication methods and workplace support systems.

Firstly, it is important for leaders to reconsider how authority and influence are structured within their teams. Traditional hierarchical leadership may not align with the expectations of Generation

Z employees thus leaders are encouraged to adopt more inclusive and participatory approaches, such as rotating leadership roles on projects, co-creating team decisions and actively inviting input from younger employees. These strategies may enhance the sense of ownership and purpose among employees, while also allowing leadership potential to emerge naturally from within the team. Additionally, implementing peer-led initiatives and encouraging team members to mentor each other are also possible ways to strengthen engagement without relying solely on formal leadership. Leaders may consider ensuring that authority is not seen as static but rather as something fluid and adaptable depending on expertise and context.

Secondly, communication remains a central concern in hybrid teams, especially for employees who divide their time between remote and on-site work. Leaders could consider to tailor their communication methods to better fit the digital preferences of Generation Z, who typically prefer quick, direct and informal communication. Utilizing tools such as WhatsApp and Teams for urgent updates and keeping formal communication to channels like email may help streamline workflows and minimize misunderstandings. However, regular and structured check-ins such as daily stand-ups or weekly video meetings could also potentially remain necessary for maintaining alignment and reinforcing team cohesion. Equally important is the tone of communication as leaders are encouraged to be accessible, emotionally responsive and transparent in their messaging. In addition, creating virtual spaces where employees are able to voice concerns or share feedback anonymously may also help leaders identify disengagement early and address it proactively.

Thirdly, trust-building showed to be an explicit goal for leaders managing hybrid teams. Leaders may consider to focus on promoting autonomy by shifting toward results-oriented evaluations rather than activity-based monitoring. Moreover, allowing employees the flexibility to take control of their time and approach tasks in a way that best fits their working preferences may likewise promote a sense of psychological safety and personal accountability. Furthermore, acknowledging mistakes, explaining changes openly and maintaining consistency in communication may also strengthen relational trust between managers and their teams. To operationalize this, managers might further benefit from training programs focused on trust-based leadership practices and organizations might even consider introducing feedback mechanisms where employees can assess leadership behaviors safely and constructively.

Lastly, organizations may consider also potentially investing in robust structural support systems that help managers track engagement levels and support employee well-being in real time. Hybrid teams can easily slip into silos or experience miscommunication if regular follow-ups and feedback systems are not in place. Therefore, organizations could consider implementing regular pulse surveys, performance dashboards and digital engagement trackers that provide both managers and human resource teams with early indicators of disengagement or burnout. Additionally, structured mentorship programs, where newer or younger employees are paired with more experienced colleagues, may also facilitate a greater sense of connection and guidance. Moreover, it may be beneficial for leaders to consider approaches that promote fairness and inclusivity in performance evaluations for both remote and on-site workers, addressing any perception of inequality in task distribution or recognition. This may help to

ensure that hybrid work arrangements remain effective, inclusive and aligned with the team's long-term goals.

By acting on these suggestions, employers and human resource professionals may be better equipped to create work environments that resonate with Generation Z values and motivations. This may, in turn, help reduce disengagement, enhance performance and foster stronger commitment within hybrid teams. These implications also provide a foundation for future initiatives aimed at aligning organizational practices with evolving employee expectations.

8. References

- Abson, E., Schofield, P., & Kennell, J. (2024). Making shared leadership work: The importance of trust in project-based organisations. *International Journal of Project Management*, 42 (2), 102575. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2024.102575>
- Academic Journal Guide. (2024). *Chartered Association of Business Schools*. Retrieved April 05, 2025, <https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide/academic-journal-guide-2024>
- Agarwal, P., Kaur, P., & Budhwar, P. (2024). Silencing Quiet Quitting: crafting a symphony of High-Performance work systems and psychological conditions. *Human Resource Management*. p621-635. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22275>
- Ali, A., Boekhorst, J. A., & Wang, H. (2025). Do shining stars cast shadows on others? Investigating the effect of star centrality on shared leadership. *Journal of Business Research*, 189, 115171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115171>
- Ali, H., & Yushi, J. (2024). Linking shared leadership and project success in virtual project teams: a moderated mediation model of teamwork and project complexity. *Strategy and Leadership*, p82-99. <https://doi.org/10.1108/sl-09-2024-0103>
- Awwad, R. I., Aljuhmani, H. Y., & Hamdan, S. (2022). Examining the relationships between frontline bank employees' job demands and job satisfaction: a mediated moderation model. *Sage Journals*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221079880>
- Bakoula, S., & Galanakis, M. (2022). The Evolution of McGregor's X and Y Theory in the contemporary organizational settings: A Systematic literature review. *Journal of Psychology Research*, 12(12), p946-950. <https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5542/2022.12.005>
- Boyras, M., & Gilbert, R. (2024). Is the future of work hybrid? Examining motivations and expectations related to working from home in knowledge workers' lived experiences. *Employee Relations*, 46(5), p1086-1111. <https://doi.org/10.1108/er-09-2023-0478>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013) *Successful qualitative research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. London, England: *SAGE Publications*.
- Buła, P., Thompson, A., & Żak, A. A. (2024). Nurturing teamwork and team dynamics in a hybrid work model. *Central European Management Journal*, 32(3), p475-489. <https://doi.org/10.1108/cemj-12-2022-0277>
- Choudhury, A., & Maupin, C. K. (2025). To share or not to share: Centering individual perspectives in shared leadership. *Group & Organization Management*. p546-573. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011241312253>

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: *Sage Publications*.

Corbin, T. A., & Flenady, G. (2024). Quiet quitting as compensatory respect: meaningful work, recognition, and the entrepreneurial ethic. *Philosophy of Management*. p461-480.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40926-024-00320-4>

Costanza, D. P., Rudolph, C. W., & Zacher, H. (2023). Are generations a useful concept? *Acta Psychologica*, 241, 104059. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2023.104059>

Daniels, G., II. (2023). Frederick Herzberg: The Two-Factor Theory and its Impact on Employee Motivation: An Analysis for the Non-Profit Organization. *LinkedIn*. Retrieved April 15, 2025, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/frederick-herzberg-two-factor-theory-its-impact-glenn-daniels-ii/>

Fernández, J. L., Morán, P. C. M., & Delfino, G. (2023). Lessons learned in people management after COVID-19 crisis. A qualitative study in Spain. *Cogent Business & Management*, 10(3).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2023.2275370>

Formica, S., & Sfodera, F. (2022). The Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting paradigm shifts: An overview of current situation and future research directions. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 31(8), p899-907. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2022.2136601>

Forskningsetik på grund- och avancerad nivå. (n.d.). *Mittuniversitetet*. Retrieved April 30, 2025, <https://www.miun.se/medarbetare/forskning/styrning-och-etik/forskningsetik-pa-grund--och-avanceradniva/>

Fuchs, O., Fuchs, L., & Lorenz, E. (2024). Generational Differences In Attitudes Towards Work And Career: A Systematic Literature Review On The Preferences Of Generations X, Y And Z. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Advanced Studies*, 11(7), p54-71.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383860257>

Georgiadou, A., Vezyridis, P., & Glaveli, N. (2025). “You pretend to pay me; I pretend to work”: A Multi-Level exploration of quiet quitting in the Greek context. *Human Resource Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22292>

Ge, X., Liu, S., Zhang, Q., Yu, H., Du, X., Song, S., & Shi, Y. (2024). What facilitates the emergence of shared leadership? The predictive role of team personality composition. *Chinese Management Studies*, 18(5), p1474-1491. <https://doi.org/10.1108/cms-07-2023-0315>

Harris, L. C. (2024). Commitment and Quiet Quitting: A qualitative longitudinal study. *Human Resource Management*. p265-616. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22274>

- Harter, J. (2022). Is Quiet Quitting real? *Gallup*. Retrieved April 9, 2025, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/398306/quiet-quitting-real.aspx>
- Ita, D. (2025). Generation Z (Gen Z): definition, birth years, and demographics. *Investopedia*. Retrieved April 9, 2025, <https://www.investopedia.com/generation-z-gen-z-definition-5218554>
- Jasmine, J. A., & Utomo, P. (2024). The role of transformational leadership, work-life balance, and employee engagement on Gen Z's organizational commitment in the Indonesian creative industry. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 22(4), p576-587. [https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.22\(4\).2024.43](https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.22(4).2024.43)
- Ji, H., Wu, S., & Xie, X. (2024). When shared leadership backfires in new venture teams: the roles of power struggles and functional background diversity. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-024-10008-y>
- Karrani, M. A., Bani-Melhem, S., & Mohd-Shamsudin, F. (2023). Employee quiet quitting behaviours: conceptualization, measure development, and validation. *Service Industries Journal*, 44(3-4), p218-236. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2023.2286604>
- Katou, A. A., Koupkas, M., & Triantafillidou, E. (2021). Job demands-resources model, transformational leadership and organizational performance: a multilevel study. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 71(7), p2704-2722. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijppm-06-2020-0342>
- Khatrri, P., Duggal, H. K., Dutta, S., Kumari, P., Thomas, A., Brod, T., & Colimoro, L. (2023). Unveiling heterogenous knowledge-oriented leadership and knowledge acquisition based hybrid work agility of knowledge workers. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 27(11), p253-278. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jkm-10-2022-0793>
- Kim, M., & Kim, T. (2024). The effect of remote work on millennials' organizational commitment: the moderating role of shared leadership and followership. *International Journal of Organization Theory and Behavior*, 27(3), p244-262. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijotb-03-2023-0063>
- Klasmeier, K. N., Güntner, A. V., & Schleu, J. E. (2025). Leadership dynamics in teams: the reciprocity of shared and empowering leadership. *Journal of Business and Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-025-10008-9>
- Lauring, J., & Jonasson, C. (2025). What is hybrid work? Towards greater conceptual clarity of a common term and understanding its consequences. *Human Resource Management Review*, 35(1), 101044. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2024.101044>
- Leslie, B., Anderson, C., Bickham, C., Horman, J., Overly, A., Gentry, C., Callahan, C., & King, J. (2021). Generation Z Perceptions of a Positive Workplace Environment. *Employee*

Responsibilities and Rights Journal, 33(3), p171-187. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10672-021-09366-2>

Liu-Lastres, B., Karatepe, O. M., & Okumus, F. (2023). Combating quiet quitting: implications for future research and practices for talent management. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 36(1), p13-24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijchm-08-2023-1317>

Lu, L., Wang, L., & Johnson, R. E. (2024). The joint fluctuations of LMX and relative LMX predict follower work effort: a Dual-Dynamic perspective. *Journal of Business and Psychology*. p79-94. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-024-09940-z>

Mansoor, T., Umer, M., & Duenas, A. (2025). Unlocking team performance: the interplay of team empowerment, shared leadership, and relationship conflict in healthcare sector. *Strategy and Leadership*. p188-214. <https://doi.org/10.1108/sl-10-2024-0118>

Morris, A. (2023). Awake-up call for baby boomers. *GrowerTalks*. Retrieved April 10, 2025, <https://www.growertalks.com/Article/?articleid=26482>

Negrușă, A. L. (2024). A review of Generations X and Y' work values and attitudes across North America and Europe. *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Negotia*, 69(1), p39-54. <https://doi.org/10.24193/subbnegotia.2024.1.02>

Nickerson, C. (2025). Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation-Hygiene. *Simply Psychology*. Retrieved April 16, 2025, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/herzbergs-two-factor-theory.html>

Plester, B., & Lloyd, R. (2024). New frontiers of fun: sharing and supporting workplace fun in hybrid work. *Employee Relations*, 46(4), p934-954. <https://doi.org/10.1108/er-07-2023-0366>

Rathi, S., & Kumar, P. (2023). Differences in work value, communication style, and leadership style among generational cohorts at the workplace. In *Role of Human Resources for Inclusive Leadership, Workplace Diversity, and Equity in Organizations*, p233-254. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-6602-5.ch010>

Rk, C. L. (2023). Understanding Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y in Human Resource Management. *Global Research Journal of Social Sciences and Management.*, 01(02), p50-59. <https://doi.org/10.55306/grjssm.2023.1205>

Saunders, M. N. K., Thornhill, A., & Lewis, P. (2019). Research methods for business students (8th ed.). Harlow, England: *Pearson*.

Srivastava, S., Saxena, A., Kapoor, V., & Qadir, A. (2023). Sailing through silence: exploring how negative gossip leaves breeding grounds for quiet quitting in the workplace. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 35(4), p733-755. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijcma-07-2023-0139>

Sun, E. (2024). From Boomers to Gen Beta: A guide to the generation names. *TODAY*. Retrieved April 12, 2025, <https://www.today.com/parents/teens/generation-names-rcna137457>

Tang, C., Chen, Y., Wei, W., & Newman, D. A. (2023). Under pressure: LMX drives employee unethical pro-organizational behavior via threat appraisals. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 195(4), p799-812. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-023-05534-6>

What is Gen Z? (2024). *McKinsey & Company*. Retrieved April 13, 2025, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-gen-z?utmm>

Wu, A., & Wei, W. (2024). Rationalizing quiet quitting? Deciphering the internal mechanism of front-line hospitality employees' workplace deviance. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 119, 103681. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2023.103681>

Ybañez, R. (2024). Application of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory: motivational factors and hygiene factors in the financial industry. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 2(4). p92-101. <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2024.0055>

Zhang, D., Wang, X., & Zhang, S. (2024). The influence of shared leadership on taking charge behavior: Dual perspective of cognition–affection. *Journal of Management & Organization*, p1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2023.70>

Zhou, L., & Ma, Y. (2024). Research on Management Strategies for Generation Z Employees from the Perspective of Two-Factor Theory. *Studies in Social Science Research*, 5(4), p12. <https://doi.org/10.22158/sssr.v5n4p12>

Zhou, Q., Wu, Q., Sun, Y., & Cormican, K. (2024). The power of many: analyzing the impact of shared leadership on project teams. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*. p53-77. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijmpb-05-2024-0132>

Ziegert, J. C., & Dust, S. B. (2020). Integrating Formal and Shared Leadership: the Moderating Influence of Role Ambiguity on Innovation. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 36(6), p969-984. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-020-09722-3>

9. Appendix

This section includes the Literature study Journal's ABS 2024 ranking as well as participants' survey and interview guidelines and instructions.

9.1 Literature study Journal's ABS 2024 ranking

Key Words	Article Title	Journal	ABS 2024 Rank
Leadership OR Shared Leadership AND Traditional Leadership	Abson et al. (2024) - <i>Making shared leadership work: The importance of trust in project-based organisations</i>	International Journal of Project Management	2
	Ali et al. (2025) - <i>Do shining stars cast shadows on others? Investigating the effect of star centrality on shared leadership</i>	Journal of Business Research	3
	Choudhury & Maupin (2025) - <i>To share or not to share: Centering individual perspectives in shared leadership</i>	Group & Organization Management	3
	Ji et al. (2024) - <i>When shared leadership backfires in new venture teams: the roles of power struggles and functional background diversity</i>	Asia Pacific Journal of Management	3
	Ziegert & Dust (2020) - <i>Integrating Formal and Shared Leadership: the Moderating Influence of Role Ambiguity on Innovation</i>	Journal of Business and Psychology	3
Shared Leadership AND Traditional Leadership	Choudhury & Maupin (2025) - <i>To share or not to share: Centering individual perspectives in shared leadership</i>	Group & Organization Management	3
	Ji et al. (2024) - <i>When shared leadership backfires in new venture teams: the roles of power struggles and functional background diversity</i>	Asia Pacific Journal of Management	3
	Ziegert & Dust (2020) - <i>Integrating Formal and Shared Leadership: the Moderating Influence of Role Ambiguity on Innovation</i>	Journal of Business and Psychology	3
Shared Leadership AND Hybrid Work OR Remote Work	Ali & Yushi (2024) - <i>Linking shared leadership and project success in virtual project teams: a moderated mediation model of teamwork and project complexity</i>	Strategy & Leadership	1
	Kim & Kim (2024) - <i>The effect of remote work on millennials' organizational commitment: the moderating role of shared leadership and followership</i>	International Journal of Organization Theory & Behavior	1

	Buła et al. (2024) - <i>Nurturing teamwork and team dynamics in a hybrid work model</i>	Central European Management Journal	1
	Plester & Lloyd (2024) - <i>New frontiers of fun: sharing and supporting workplace fun in hybrid work</i>	Employee Relations	2
Hybrid Work OR Remote Work AND Quiet Quitting	Formica & Sfodera (2022) - <i>The Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting paradigm shifts: An overview of current situation and future research directions</i>	Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management	1
	Liu-Lastres et al. (2023) - <i>Combating quiet quitting: implications for future research and practices for talent management</i>	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	3
	Boyras & Gilbert (2024) - <i>Is the future of work hybrid? Examining motivations and expectations related to working from home in knowledge workers' lived experiences</i>	Employee Relations	2
Quiet Quitting AND Generation Z OR Gen Z	Formica & Sfodera (2022) - <i>The Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting paradigm shifts: An overview of current situation and future research directions</i>	Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management	1
	et al. (2023) - <i>Combating quiet quitting: implications for future research and practices for talent management</i>	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	3
	Georgiadou et al. (2025) - <i>You pretend to pay me; I pretend to work": A Multi-Level exploration of quiet quitting in the Greek context</i>	Human Resource Management	4
	Karrani et al. (2023) - <i>Employee quiet quitting behaviours: conceptualization, measure development, and validation</i>	Service Industries Journal	2
Leadership AND Hybrid Work AND Generation Z AND Quiet Quitting AND Engagement	Kim & Kim (2024) - <i>The effect of remote work on millennials' organizational commitment: the moderating role of shared leadership and followership</i>	International Journal of Organization Theory & Behavior	1
	Jasmine & Utomo (2024) - <i>The role of transformational leadership, work-life balance, and employee engagement on Gen Z's organizational commitment in the Indonesian creative industry</i>	Problems and Perspectives in Management	1

9.2 Online Survey Instruction and Questionnaire

Understanding leadership and engagement among Generation Z in Hybrid workplaces.

Dear participant,

We are Master's students in Business Administration, Marketing and Management at Mid Sweden University, conducting research as part of our thesis. This survey targets Generation Z employees (born 1997-2012) who have experience in hybrid work environments, including both remote and in-office settings.

This study aims to explore how leadership practices align with the values and expectations of Generation Z employees (born 1997-2012), especially within hybrid work environments. By focusing on how leadership can foster motivation, trust and a sense of purpose, the research seeks to identify strategies that enhance both employee and employer experiences in evolving organizational contexts.

The survey link will be distributed online via Facebook groups and WhatsApp groupchats and we also encourage you to share it with others who meet these criteria. These methods will help us reach individuals who can provide valuable insights on the topic.

This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Additionally, all responses are anonymous and confidential, used solely for academic purposes.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us through our emails here:

feme2400@student.miun.se

joan2409@student.miun.se

Thank you for your time and participation!

Kind regards,
Felicia & Jones

Section 1: Demographics

1. What year were you born? _____
2. Which country do you currently work in? _____

Section 2: Hybrid Work Experience

- Hybrid work refers to a mix of remote and on-site work, where employees split their time between working from home and working in a shared physical location.

3. Have you ever worked in a hybrid team setting?
-Please feel free to exit the survey if your answer is "No"
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
4. Are you currently working in a hybrid team setting?
 - ☐ Yes → (Track 1)
 - ☐ No → (Track 2)

Track 1- Current Experience

5. How long have you worked in a hybrid team setting?
 - ☐ Less than 1 year
 - ☐ 1 - 3 years
 - ☐ More than 3 years
6. How frequently do you work remotely (not in a physical office) in your current hybrid role?
 - ☐ Every day
 - ☐ Several times a week
 - ☐ About once a week
 - ☐ A few times a month
 - ☐ Rarely

Track 2- Past Hybrid Experience

5. When was the last time you last worked in a hybrid team setting?
 - ☐ Within the past year
 - ☐ 1 - 3 years ago
 - ☐ More than 3 years ago
6. For how long did you work in that hybrid setting?
 - ☐ Less than 1 year
 - ☐ 1 - 3 years
 - ☐ More than 3 years

Section 3: Leadership in Hybrid Work Settings

7. To what extent is decision-making clearly communicated in your hybrid team?

- ☐ Very Clear
- ☐ Clear
- ☐ Moderately Clear
- ☐ Unclear
- ☐ Very Unclear

8. My team leader notices when I'm becoming less engaged or motivated during virtual work.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

9. Which leadership-related factors are most important for keeping you motivated in a hybrid team?

Please tick up to 3 options:

- ☐ Clear communication
- ☐ Mutual trust and respect
- ☐ Opportunities to lead or contribute
- ☐ Recognition and feedback
- ☐ Transparency in decision-making
- ☐ Autonomy and flexibility in my work
- ☐ Structured guidance and support
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

10. Which leadership-related factors reduce your motivation in a hybrid team setting?

Please tick up to 3 options:

- ☐ Lack of communication
- ☐ Micromanagement or lack of trust
- ☐ Unclear roles or responsibilities
- ☐ Lack of recognition or feedback
- ☐ Unfair or opaque decision-making
- ☐ Too much or too little structure
- ☐ Limited autonomy or flexibility
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Section 4: Workload Responsibilities & Job Satisfaction

11. How would you rate your satisfaction with the responsibilities assigned to you in your team?

- ☐ Very Satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Very Dissatisfied

12. Which of the following reason(s) could make you feel dissatisfied with your responsibilities at work?

Please select all that apply:

- ☐ Tasks that don't match my skills or interests
- ☐ Unclear expectations
- ☐ Repetitive or unchallenging work
- ☐ Unequal workload distribution
- ☐ Limited opportunity to contribute or grow
- ☐ Poor communication from the team leader
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

13. How frequently do you take on tasks or responsibilities outside your official role in your team?

- ☐ Every day
- ☐ Several times a week
- ☐ About once a week
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Rarely or never

14. My contributions are recognized and valued by my team members.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

15. I trust that my team leader has my best interests in mind when making decisions that affect our work.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

16. I trust that my team members have my best interests in mind when making decisions that affect our work.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Section 5: Team Communication in Hybrid work Settings

- Hybrid work refers to a mix of remote and on-site work, where employees split their time between working from home and working in a shared physical location.

17. In my experience, team members communicate effectively and transparently in our hybrid work environment.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

18. I feel at ease sharing my thoughts and concerns with my hybrid team.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

19. When I face challenges, I receive prompt assistance from my hybrid team members, without relying on a formal leader.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Section 6: Thoughts & Personal Insights on Leadership

20. How would you describe the leadership style you have experienced in your team(s)? - Please choose one option that best reflects your experiences.

- ☐ One person usually directs the team and makes most decisions
- ☐ Responsibilities and decision-making are generally shared among team members
- ☐ Sometimes one person leads, and other times the team shares responsibility
- ☐ Leadership roles or responsibilities are not clearly defined
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

21. I am more motivated to contribute in a hybrid team where leadership is shared among all team members.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

22. How confident are you in the potential of sharing responsibilities and decision-making to effectively address team challenges?

- ☐ Very Confident
- ☐ Confident
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not confident
- ☐ Very Unconfident

23. How has a team-based approach to leadership (or the lack of it) influenced your overall experience in hybrid teams?

Please choose all that apply:

- ☐ I felt more engaged and included
- ☐ It improved communication and collaboration
- ☐ It increased trust among team members
- ☐ It created confusion or unclear roles
- ☐ I didn't notice a difference
- ☐ I haven't experienced this approach
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

24. Which team leadership practices help you stay motivated, connected and effective in your role?

Please choose up to 3:

- ☐ Taking part in decisions that affect the team
- ☐ Open and transparent communication
- ☐ Being trusted to lead tasks or take initiative
- ☐ Getting recognition and feedback
- ☐ Flexibility and autonomy in how I work
- ☐ Clearly defined roles and support
- ☐ Peer collaboration without relying only on a manager
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

25. In your view, what leadership strategies can help prevent doing only the bare minimum in hybrid teams?

Please select up to 3:

- ☐ Peer collaboration without relying only on a manager
- ☐ Regular check-ins and communication
- ☐ Involving team members in decisions
- ☐ Giving clear goals and expectations
- ☐ Recognition and appreciation
- ☐ Flexibility and independence
- ☐ Encouraging peer support and teamwork
- ☐ Support from an approachable leader
- ☐ Opportunities for growth and development
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

9.3 Semi-Structured Interview Instruction

Hej,

We are Master's students in Business Administration, Marketing and Management at Mid Sweden University and we are currently conducting research for our thesis. Our study explores what leadership styles and behaviors are most effective in motivating Generation Z employees (born between 1997–2012) in hybrid work environments settings that combine both remote and in-office work.

The purpose of this interview is to explore your thoughts, experiences and perspectives on leadership that motivates Gen Z employees. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes of your time and with your permission, we will be audio recording the conversation to ensure accuracy in our data analysis. Please also note that responses will remain anonymous and confidential and will be used solely for academic purposes only.

If you have any questions before or after the interview, feel free to contact us via email:

feme2400@student.miun.se

joan2409@student.miun.se

Thank you for your time and participation- we really appreciate your insights and contributions to this research!

Kind regards,
Felicia & Jones

9.3.1 Interview Guide: **Employers**

Initial Control Questions

- Are you okay with this interview being recorded for academic purposes?
- What year were you born?
- Which country are you currently working in?
- What type of organization do you currently work for? - *Private company, Public sector, Government agency, Non-profit/NGO or Other (please specify)*.
- How many years have you been working in this organization? And of which, how many years has it been in a leadership role?
- Which department are you working in and what are your main work tasks?
- Do you and your team work in a hybrid environment, combining both remote and on-site work?
- Do you currently have Gen Z employees (born between 1997 and 2012) on your team, or have you ever worked with them in the past?

Main questions

1. Understanding Your Leadership Style
 - How do you typically make decisions within your team? Do you prefer to take the lead yourself or involve team members in decision-making processes? Can you describe an example?
 - In your team, how are responsibilities typically distributed? Do you assign tasks based on roles and hierarchy or do team members take initiative and share responsibilities more fluidly?
 - What do you think are the most important factors that make cooperation work well in your team?
 - What do you do to create a positive and open environment in your team? Can you share an example of how this has influenced how responsibilities or decisions are shared in your group?
 - What adjustments (if any), have you made to your leadership style when managing Gen Z employees? Can you share an experience that influenced this shift?
2. Leading in a Hybrid Working Environment
 - How did the shift during the COVID-19 pandemic reshape the way your team works and how did it impact your role as a leader?
 - What have been the biggest challenges and advantages of leading a hybrid team? Can you give an example of a situation that stands out in this context and what you learnt from it?
 - Have you noticed any differences in how different age groups adapt to hybrid work and if so can you describe these? Can you give some examples?
 - What leadership factors do you believe are crucial for motivating Gen Z employees in hybrid teams?
3. Observing Changes in employees' attitude towards work

- Have you noticed any signs that an employee might be pulling back from active participation or involvement at work? If so, what kinds of signs stood out?
- Have you noticed any patterns or signs that seem to occur more frequently in certain age groups? If so, which age group do these observations pertain to? Please share your experiences.
- In your opinion, how do different leadership styles for example, giving direct instructions versus involving team members in decisions affect how people stay involved or motivated at work?

4. Addressing Engagement through Leadership

- Some studies suggest that involving employees more actively in leadership can increase engagement. What's your take on that in relation to Gen Z in hybrid teams?
- In your view, what specific leadership practices have helped you keep Gen Z team members engaged and motivated?
- What can a leader do early on if they notice that a team member seems less motivated or less involved than usual?

5. Further comments

- Do you have any further thoughts or experiences related to leadership and engagement in hybrid teams that you think we should know about?

9.3.2 Interview Guide: **Employees**

Initial Control Questions

- Are you okay with this interview being recorded for academic purposes?
- Can you confirm that your birth year falls between 1997 and 2012? Which specific year?
- Which country are you currently working in?
- What type of organization do you currently work for? - *Private company, Public sector, Government agency, Non-profit/NGO or Other (please specify).*
- Have you ever worked in a hybrid team (a mix of remote and on-site work) or are you currently working in one now?
- How long have you been working for this company?
- Which department are you working in and what are your main work tasks?

Main Questions

1. Leadership Experience

- Have you experienced a leader who primarily made decisions on their own and directed the team without much collaboration? How did that leadership style impact your work, motivation and relationship with the team?
- How would you personally describe good leadership in a team setting? For example, think of a great leader you've worked with- what qualities, behaviors and skills made them stand out?
- Can you describe a time when your manager included you (or didn't) in a decision that affected your work? How did that make you feel and what was the result?
- Do you feel comfortable giving feedback to your manager or leader? Why or why? What factors influence how open you feel to speak up?

2. Hybrid Work Experience

- How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the way you work, and how did it impact the way you were supported or managed?
- How has working in hybrid environments (splitting time between home and the office) influenced your overall motivation?
- How and in what way has hybrid work influenced your sense of connection with your team or manager? Can you think of a moment that highlights this change and share one example of a challenge or improvement you've experienced?
- How would you describe your current communication patterns with your manager and team? - Which tools or channels (example, email, chat, video calls) do you use most and how often do you communicate?

3. Reflections on Engagement at Work

- Can you recall a time when you felt less motivated or disconnected from your work? What contributed to that feeling and how did you respond to that situation? Did you speak to someone, change how you worked or just push through it?
- Can you describe a specific moment when a manager made you feel truly valued or re-engaged at work? What exactly did they do and why did it matter to you?

- Some studies suggest that involving employees in leadership can increase engagement. How do you think this applies to Gen Z in hybrid teams?

4. Re-engagement and Leadership Preferences

- Do you prefer leaders who take charge and give clear instructions or those who seek input and promote shared decision-making? Why?
- In a hybrid work setting, what leadership qualities or behaviors do you find most effective for keeping you engaged? Can you share a specific experience where a leader's approach worked well (or didn't) for you?
- How do you experience trust within your team? Can you share an example of how trust (or lack of it) influenced leadership behaviors or your level of engagement?

5. Further comments

- Do you have any further thoughts or experiences related to leadership and engagement in hybrid teams that you think we should know about?