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Leading the Future

How the Gender of Leaders Influences the Development of a Supportive Organizational
Culture in the Hybrid Work Era

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Abstract

Title:

        Leading the Future: How the Gender of Leaders Influences the Development of a Supportive Organizational Culture in the Hybrid Work Era.

Keywords:

        Gender, individual behavior, transformational leadership, organizational culture, supportive culture, hybrid work

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Purpose:

        The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between the gender of organizational leaders and their influence on the development of a supportive organizational culture in the context of hybrid work, with a focus on their specific actions and behaviors.

Research question:

        How does the gender of organizational leaders influence the development of a supportive organizational culture in the context of hybrid work?

Literature review:

        The literature review consisted of both more traditional theories such as the full-range leadership theory, but also newer management theories, especially with regards to the new trend of hybrid work settings. The literature review further has a structure that is designed according to the research question of the study. First, theories about gender are presented, which are followed by theories about leadership and organizational culture.

Methods:

        This research has a qualitative focus on data collection. The research design was multiple-case study, comparing female and male leadership approaches. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via video meetings, with an equal number of male and female leaders working with professional teams at offices located in Sweden. The analysis was further conducted through thematic analysis.

Conclusions:

        This research concludes that the individual behavior of leaders significantly influences their leadership style, and impacts their approaches and strategies in developing a supportive culture. Specifically, stereotypical "feminine" traits are found to be especially beneficial, both when it comes to exhibiting transformational leadership style and in the shaping of approaches and strategies in developing a supportive organizational culture.

Acknowledgement

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1. Introduction

This introductory chapter provides an introduction to the research topic, followed by a problem discussion. This serves as a foundation for the purpose and the chosen research question of this study. Lastly, the research gap within this area is presented to underline the importance of this study, followed by delimitations and an illustrated disposition of the content of this paper.

1.1 Background

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevailing work arrangement has become a hybrid model in varying forms (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). Such arrangements offer the employees a greater level of control over both the location and the time of where their work is performed (Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023). Hybrid work seems to be here to stay, and according to a survey done by McKinsey in 2022, 75 percent of 885 respondents revealed that they would prefer hybrid working over traditional settings. Additionally, of those that expressed this preference, 71 percent said that they would most likely start looking for other opportunities if this flexibility would not be available where they work today (Dowling et al., 2022). While hybrid work indeed offers several benefits such as an improved work-life balance and greater job satisfaction (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023), it also brings several challenges, such as employees feeling isolated or disconnected from their colleagues (Benedic, 2023). The need for an organizational culture that emphasizes relationship-building, open communication, collaboration and trust has therefore become more critical than ever (Van Pottelsberghe, 2022; Summerfield, 2022; Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023), which is much connected to a so-called supportive organizational culture (Wallach, 1983). While many factors can influence the culture, the role of leaders is particularly crucial (Schein, 2004), where the hybrid work environment requires leaders to prioritize their focus on understanding and adapting to the changing needs and behaviors of their employees (Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023).

However, the impact of gender on leadership style and organizational culture is an area that has received relatively little attention. Research has shown that men and women often lead differently (Taleb, 2010), and these differences can have an implication for how they shape the organizational culture (Sendra, 2022). This research aims to explore the prevailing hybrid

work trend and the role gender of organizational leaders have in developing a supportive culture in hybrid work models. By examining the leadership styles of both male and female leaders, this research will contribute to a better understanding of the factors that shape a supportive culture in hybrid work settings.

1.2 Problem discussion

Leaders play a crucial role in shaping the organizational culture. Through the things they pay attention to and celebrate, effective leaders continuously shape the culture (Schein, 2004). However, not all leaders have the same influence on the culture (Sendra, 2022), which means that some may be better at maneuvering hybrid working conditions than others. According to the social role theory by Eagly (1997), women are formed by specific expectations from society already from birth, making them develop characteristics that are more nurturing in nature. Women furthermore tend to be more emphatic and people-oriented in their behavior, while men, on the other hand, tend to be more agentic and task-oriented. It is, however, unclear how these expectations and social roles of females and males influence their organizational cultural competencies. Furthermore, research also shows that women and men prefer different types of cultures (Van Vianen & Fischer, 2002). If there's a difference in women and men's cultural preferences, these preferences may also follow them into their leadership roles and hence make them create and maintain different types of organizational cultures.

Moreover, significant and abrupt changes in the environment may require organizations to adapt their culture in order to fit in the new environmental conditions (Meyerson & Martin, 1987). With the new trend of hybrid work, the previous environmental conditions that used to thrive in social interactions are instead shifting to an environment where teams are spread out and instead are connecting through digital tools and social platforms. The physical distance and less face-to-face interactions can therefore make it harder to build relationships and a sense of community among the team members (Hirsch, 2021). This means that the pre-existing office-based organizational culture may no longer be applicable to the new circumstances, which perhaps leads to leaders needing to rebuild the organizational culture of today's scattered workforce (Spicer, 2020). This area of investigation is therefore highly relevant, especially since building a strong organizational culture is known for being key to organizational success and has shown to have a big impact on many organizational outcomes

such as employees attitudes, financial and operational performance (Hartnell et al., 2011). Therefore, understanding what influences leaders' ability to develop a supportive culture during hybrid work is crucial. There is a gap in the literature regarding what role gender has on this topic, which highlights the need for further research.

1.3 Definitions

This section provides the reader with an overview of key concepts used in this study. As many key concepts may have a variety of definitions, it is crucial to specify their meaning within the context of this research. The purpose is therefore to ensure that the reader has a clear understanding of the concepts used throughout the paper.

1.3.1 Leadership

Often, there is a distinction between informal versus formal leadership (or emergent versus assigned leadership). The former is not based on title and most often emerge naturally within a group or organization through for instance the leader's communication behaviors and personality (Northouse, 2021). The latter, and the term that is used in this study, is typically based on a formal position or title, such as manager or team leader. The real difference between these two types of leaders are the levels of accountability and authority. That is, while both types of leaders can have an impact on the organization or team, formal leadership is generally seen as more authoritative and accountable (Miner 2013). It is furthermore the policies and messages by the formal leader that formalize the organizational culture (Schein, 2004). Because this research investigates the relationship between leadership and organizational culture, formal leadership is determined to be the most appropriate definition when referring to leadership in this study.

1.3.2 Organizational culture

In order for an organizational culture to exist, there has to be an organization with a number of individuals interacting with each other for the purpose of a common goal. The founder of the organization is the one who creates such a group, and his or her personality then starts to shape the culture of that organizational group. However, the culture does not exist until the group has overcome various crises of growth, and found solutions for how to handle both external and internal problems (Schein, 1995). In accordance with this, organizational culture is by Schein (2004, p. 17) defined as: "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has

worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems". Organizational culture is therefore the shared patterns of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and values that are formed based on the groups' shared experiences and learning (Schein, 2004). This definition of organizational culture will be used in order to understand how male and female leaders, through their behaviors, things they pay attention to, reward, measure and control (Schein, 1995), impact the development of a supportive culture within an organization.

1.3.3 Hybrid work

Hybrid work is described as a flexible work arrangement, specifically by using digital communication technologies allowing the employees to divide their time between working at the office and working remotely. That is, it describes the ability for employees to exercise a degree of independence and flexibility in selecting the place where they carry out their work responsibilities (Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023).

1.4 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between the gender of organizational leaders and their influence on the development of a supportive organizational culture in the context of hybrid work, with a specific focus on their actions and behaviors. The aim is therefore to explore how the gender of organizational leaders influences their approach in developing a supportive culture, and whether there are any differences in the strategies used by male and female leaders. With this as a background, the research question is as follows:

- How does the gender of organizational leaders influence the development of a supportive organizational culture in the context of hybrid work?

1.5 Research gap

Women are increasingly taking on leadership roles. Because of this, and the massive increase of hybrid work as an aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is highly relevant to study the phenomenon of organizational culture in a hybrid setting, and what effect leaders of different genders have on this. Even though the massive trend towards hybrid work is relatively new, and best practice is still being investigated by many organizations, it is still of interest to

explore how organizations work with their organizational culture today and which lessons they can bring with them for future work.

Although there is research on the impact of gender on leadership style and organizational culture (for instance Sendra, 2022), there appears to be a research gap in exploring the intersection of gender, leadership styles, organizational culture and hybrid work. Leading virtual teams remotely has presented new challenges for leaders, which have been demonstrated to be more difficult than leading face-to-face teams (Liao, 2017). The hybrid work has also brought about challenging consequences for organizational cultures, creating a need for new methods to maintain it and to involve employees, compared to traditional methods (Lukas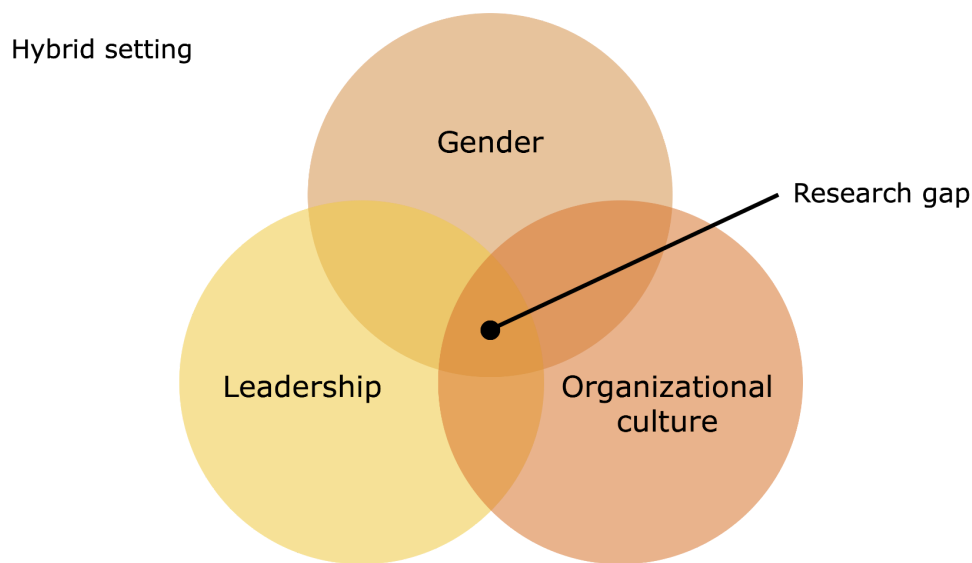ik-Stachowiak, 2022). This thesis aims at filling that gap, by exploring how the gender of organizational leaders influence the development of a supportive organizational culture in the context of hybrid work settings.

Figure 1. Research gap

1.6 Delimitations

This research was delimited in the sense that it only investigated organizations located in Sweden. This was done due to convenience when conducting the interviews, but also to ensure an as accurate comparison between the organizations as possible since there may be cultural differences when analyzing organizations in different countries.

Secondly, the research was also delimited to only investigating professional teams. This personal definition refers to teams who are doing more advanced work and that may require a higher degree of education. This delimitation was set on the basis that leadership may differ considerably depending on what type of teams that are being led. By focusing on professional teams, it ensures a more fair view amongst the respondents.

1.7 Disposition

As illustrated in Figure 2, this research is divided into six chapters. The paper begins with an introductory chapter, followed by a literature review, methodology, empirical findings, analysis and finally a conclusion. In order to provide additional guidance to the reader, each chapter starts with a brief overview of the content that is covered in that particular chapter.

Figure 2. Disposition of chapters

2. Literature review

In this chapter, a review of existing literature has been conducted. The structure of this chapter follows the content, or the main elements, of the chosen research question. In order to understand how male and female leaders develop a supportive organizational culture during hybrid work, it is imperative to firstly understand gender roles in general. This is followed by an understanding of leadership generally and in hybrid settings, and then how gender influences leadership. Since this research also aims at getting an understanding of organizational culture during hybrid work, a review of organizational culture, both in general and in a hybrid setting, is conducted. Lastly, these elements are connected by reviewing what literature says about leadership in relation to organizational culture.
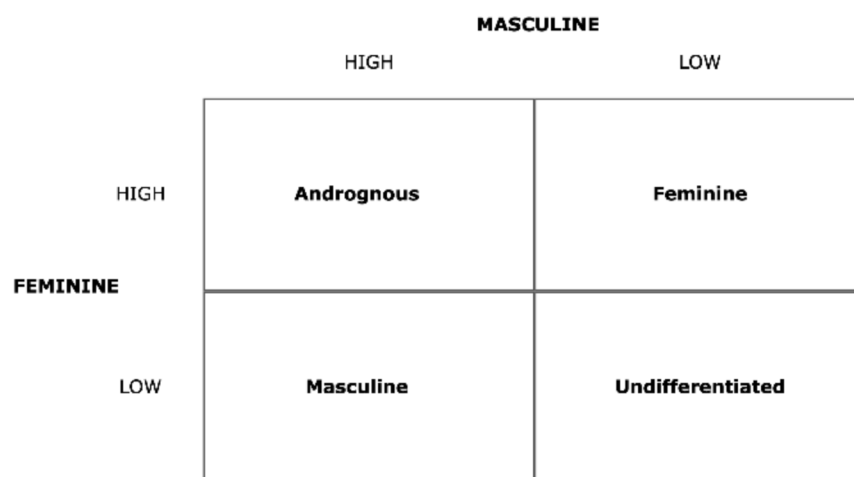
2.1 Gender

The different ways in which gender of leaders impacts organizational settings has been well researched over the years. One of the most commonly referred theories in this area is the

so-called social role theory (Eagly, 1997). This theory suggests that "attitudes towards and behaviors of men and women exist in a cycle: beliefs are formed based on societal roles, which leads men and women to adopt those roles within their own lives, which in turn reinforces those beliefs in society and in the workplace" (Eagly, 1997, as cited in Sendra, 2022, p.5). That is, these societal beliefs are based on the idea that women and men are expected to have certain characteristics which equip them for activities that they are typically inclined to do. Historically, women were responsible for being caretakers and taking care of duties at home, while men were responsible for work and providing for the family. This has not only continued to impact the expectations of gender roles, but in turn also led women and men to actually adopt these behaviors into their lives (Eagly, 1997). That is, not only are a man *expected* to work and provide for his family, but he also tends to *be* more task and goal-oriented in his behaviors (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). These tendencies further explain women as having better ability to comprehend nonverbal cues and being more friendly, unselfish, emphatic and emotionally expressive. Men, on the contrary, tend to be more assertive, independent, more focused on tasks and are more inclined to emerge as leaders (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 1991). Women are therefore being positioned to talk and behave in ways that are stereotypically associated with "femininity" and men are positioned to talk and behave in ways that are stereotypically associated with "masculinity" (Walker & Aritz, 2015). Table 1 below shows widely referred characteristics of the stereotypical "feminine" and "masculine" behaviors.

Table 1. *Widely referred characteristics of the stereotypical "feminine" and "masculine" behaviors (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003).*

However, Bem (1974) states that many people do not fit into these traditional gender differences. That is, women can behave in a stereotypically "masculine" manner and men can behave in a stereotypically "feminine" manner. The degree to which a person holds stereotypically feminine or masculine attributes is also known as the gender role self-concept. There are four types of gender role self-concepts, which are: feminine (high on feminine traits, low on masculine traits), masculine (high on masculine traits, low on feminine traits), androgynous (high on both feminine and masculine traits), and undifferentiated (low on both feminine and masculine traits), as shown in Figure 3 below. Individuals leaning towards being androgynous possess a broad set of behavioral options that makes them able to behave in a flexible and adaptable way within different contexts and situational demands (Bem, 1974). In organizational settings, in particular leadership positions, high levels of both "feminine" and "masculine" traits, i.e androgynous behavior, seems to be most beneficial (Kark et al., 2012).

Figure 3. Gender role self-concept (Bem 1974).

However, research within the field of androgynous behavior has also received criticism. One criticism is towards the fact that this view is too narrow. Instead it is believed that individuals construct multiple selves, shown in different situations. This means that, depending on the situation or context, individuals may exhibit different degrees of "feminine" and "masculine" behaviors (Cook, 1985). However, regardless of the focus of social role theory or gender role self-concept, much research has indeed concluded that women, or "feminine" traits, tend to be better at social behaviors while men, or "masculine" traits, tend to be better at

task-oriented behaviors (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 1991; Walker & Aritz, 2015). However, even though research has observed behavioral differences between women and men, "femininity" and "masculinity", it is important to understand that there are no "better" or "worse" qualities. Instead, the different behaviors and traits are as much beneficial, depending on different factors, such as context and environment. Still, these differences can influence how leadership is conducted, and may also impact what kind of organizational culture that these leaders tend to create (Sendra, 2022).

2.2 Leadership style

Before being able to address how gender and leadership styles interact, an understanding of how leadership operates generally must first be achieved.

The significance of leadership has long been considered as a crucial factor in comprehending different types of organizational issues. However, the view of effective leadership has changed significantly over the years. Much of the early research in this area stated that great leadership is something an individual is born to become, which is referred to as trait theories of leadership. As late as in the 1950s, researchers were instead shifting their focus from trait theories towards behavioral theories. This view on leadership argues that specific leadership styles or behaviors are more important than born traits in determining how effective a leader is (Fernandez, 2008).

One well-known behavioral theory is the full-range leadership theory, which includes three overarching leadership styles; the transformational, transactional and laissez faire (Avolio, 2010). These are sometimes described as being on a spectrum and the higher up the spectrum a leader goes, the more leadership effectiveness increases (Lowe, 1996).
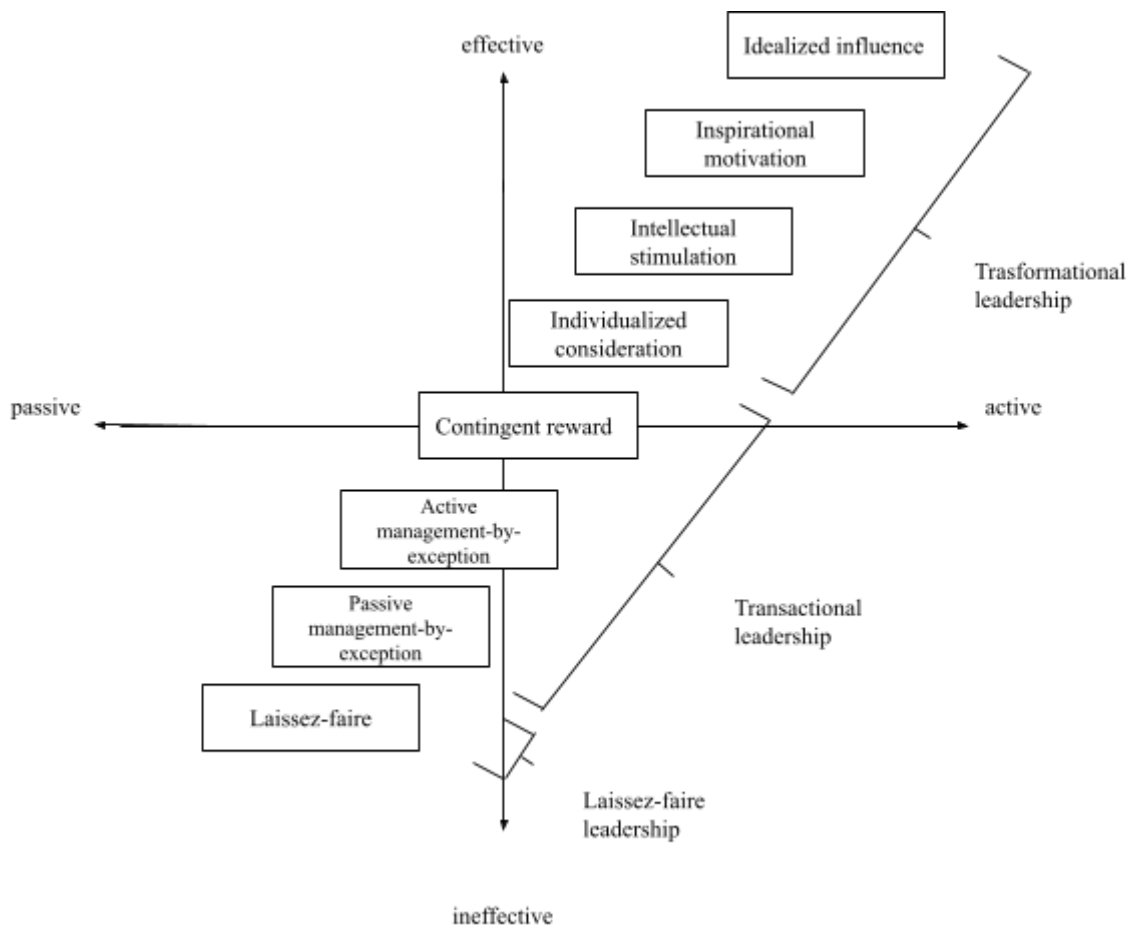
Figure 4. *The full-range leadership theory (Lindberg, 2022), adapted from Avolio and Bass (2002).*

At the very bottom is the laissez faire, i.e lack of leadership. As it represents the absence of leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), it is considered to be the most ineffective style of the three (Itzkovich et al., 2020). The transactional leadership style is placed in the middle of the spectrum (Lowe, 1996), and occurs when the leader is rewarding or disciplining the employees, depending on their performance (Hickman, 2010). This leadership style furthermore consists of three dimensions: contingent reward, management by expectation - active and passive. *Contingent reward* relates to the leader setting up constructive exchanges with the employees. The leader is clear with expectations and sets up rewards for meeting those expectations. *Management by expectation - active* regards the leader's active monitoring behavior, where the leader looks out for problems and actively corrects those before it causes serious difficulties. *Management by expectation - passive*, on the other hand, waits with acting until that behavior of the employees already has created a problem (Bass, 1997; Hickman, 2010). The transactional leaders' relationship with employees is

characterized as transactional, where the employees are doing as they are told out of obligation rather than motivation (Bass & Avolio, 1996, referred to by Sendra, 2022).

To counter the disadvantages with the transactional leader, the full-range leadership theory presents the transformational leader as a more effective leadership style (Bass, 1985). These types of leaders use four behavioral dimensions to encourage and inspire their teams into their greatest potential. *Idealized influence* (or *charisma)* occurs when leaders exhibit admirable behavior and lead by exemplifying their own values and beliefs, resulting in the employee's identifying with them. That is, they act as role models (Avolio et al., 1999). *Inspirational motivation* involves finding and articulating an optimistic vision for the organization and provides meaning for the task at hand, which appeals and inspires the employees of the team (Bass, 1997; Avolio et al., 1999). Change within the organization can only occur if the employees have a sense of purpose and a positive view on where the organization is going. It is therefore this vision that motivates the employees into action (Daft, 2008). *Intellectual stimulation* is generated when the leader motivates the employees to think independently, challenge and reframe assumptions, and tackle old challenges with innovative approaches. The leaders with this trait stimulates and encourages creativity in the employees. *Individualized consideration* regards the leader's degree of attending to each employees' needs and in helping them to accomplish their full potential (Bass, 1997; Avolio et al., 1999). It's furthermore their ability to listen to the employees' concerns and needs and in acting as a coach that exemplifies this behavior (Bass 1985).

These leaders differ from others in the sense of having high motivation and strong emotional connections. There's more of a focus on the people, with a lot of trust in them (Streimikiene et al., 2021). Daft (2008) further relates to four areas in which the transformational leadership differs from the transactional style. First and foremost, he mentioned the transformational leaders' ability to develop the employees into leaders themselves. The main task of this leader is therefore not to gain as many followers as he or she possibly can, but rather to raise as many leaders as possible (Streimikiene et al., 2021; Daft, 2008; Avolio, 2010). By that, the leader is giving the employees greater freedom. Through articulating a vision for the organization that appeals and inspires the employees moving forward, the leader defines the boundaries in which the employees can operate in relative freedom in order to accomplish the goals. Secondly, the transformational leader pays attention to both lower-level physical needs, such as safety, and higher-level physical needs, such as self-esteem, growth and development.

Therefore, the transformational leader does not only set tasks that meet immediate needs, but which also meet the employees needs to a higher level and that connects them to the overall mission of the organization. The third area in which this leader differs from the transactional style, is in how the transformational leader inspires the employees to go beyond their own self-interest. By motivating the employees to believe in change, and to sacrifice for the greater purpose, the transformational leader motivates employees to do more than expected for the sake of the organizational mission. Last area regards the leader's communication of vision and the ability to get others to share that dream with them (Daft, 2008).

Transformational leadership is therefore being directly linked to both performance across tasks, as well as performance on a team and organizational level, which reveals why it is considered as the most effective leadership style of the three (Wang et al., 2011). However, when it comes to the transactional and transformational leadership styles, Yammarino and Bass (1990) additionally stresses the importance of a multiple level of analysis. That is, it is necessary to investigate whether the leader-follower interactions are differentiated between individuals, within groups, and groups to further investigate the leadership styles. First, the leader can present a similar style towards the entire group of employees, which results in the relationships to be similar with all the employees in the group. Second, the leader-follower relationship is on a one-to-one basis within the group, where the leader displays different styles towards each employee. This means that leaders' interaction can be different depending on who they are interacting with, and the overall dynamic of the group. In the third perspective on the leader-follower relationship, the interactions are not group based, but based on individual differences. The interactions are individualized and are not dependent on the other individuals in the group Yammarino & Bass, 1990).

The results of the study made by Yammarino and Bass (1990) further showed that transformational leadership, in comparison to the transactional, is more strongly associated with the *individual* leader-follower interaction. This might be explained by the fact that behaviors to stimulate employees intellectually is something that often is tailored to each employee. The same goes for showing individualized consideration, which requires the leader to focus on the uniqueness of each individual in front of him or her. However, the authors also implies that some characteristics that may be admirable and respected by some employees, also can be perceived as being disturbing to others. Therefore, they conclude that it seems to be an "optimum" level of transformational leadership for each individual

employee, as some may require and accept a higher level than others. Again, this relates to the *individual* leader-follower interaction, where the leader must tailor his or her style towards the different needs and types of employees (Yammarino & Bass, 1990).

2.2.1 Leadership in hybrid work settings

The transition towards hybrid work has changed how leadership is exercised, as leaders now must effectively communicate with both in-person and remote team members (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Some researchers (for instance Purvanova and Kenda, 2018) imply that leaders should operate opposing behaviors, as virtual leaders need to focus more than ever on helping teams to coordinate tasks and facilitate team processes of all sorts, at the same time as they have to guide relationship building processes and foster unity and motivation in dispersed teams. Operating opposing behaviors means that instead of leaning towards only one leadership style, the leader must be a simultaneous combination of transactional *and* transformational leadership (Purvanova & Kenda, 2018). However, as both the transactional and the transformational leadership styles influence task-orientation, directly or indirectly, the transformational leadership entails something additional that the transactional leadership lacks. That is, the transformational leadership supplements the transactional leadership by focusing on relationship-building and hence making teamwork and cooperation salient, which is crucial when it comes to managing hybrid teams (Huang et al., 2010). Relationships have always been important, but perhaps mean even more when it comes to hybrid work (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Not only does strong relationships increase knowledge sharing within the team, and serve as governance, as trust reduces the likelihood of opportunistic behavior, but individuals within teams generally also rely on their personal relationships in order to solve problems and to deal with difficult situations (Pauleen, 2003). Therefore, Pauleen (2003) suggests that stronger relationships between team members also can be considered important for higher task performance.

However, since the hybrid work model means that some employees are in the office while others are at home, the communication takes place via different channels and in different forms (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). With these new forms of communication, interpersonal bonds are more difficult to create and maintain, leading to challenges in developing trust amongst team members (Joshi et al., 2009). Related to this issue, Joshi et al. (2009) found that inspirational motivation, one of the components of transformational leadership, has a positive effect on trust among teams that are locally dispersed. In the light of

this, much research indeed underlines the importance of particularly transformational leadership when working in hybrid settings (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012; Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023; Pauleen, 2003).

As hybrid work balances between both collaboration and autonomy, Wiatr and Showron-Mielnik (2023) also implies the importance of employee autonomy. As it does not mean leaving the employees to work on their own, but rather to give them the freedom to work in a way that is best suited in accordance to their wellbeing and productivity, behaviors such as the stimulation of employees independence of the transformational leader is especially underlined as important (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Yet other supporting arguments for the transformational leadership style in hybrid contexts is made by Wiatr and Showron-Mielnik (2023) who refers to such leaders as being in the middle of the hybrid team, acting as facilitators and coordinators. Especially important is the transformational leader's behavior of individualized consideration, described by the researchers as "the inclusion of people into the transformation process and the need to diagnose their wishes, needs, values and abilities in the right way" (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023, p.7). Leaders need to be emphatic towards how employees are feeling, practice good listening skills and show genuine concern for their well-being (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023).

In summary, it is noted that much literature in this area provides strong support for transformational leadership as being the most effective style when it comes to leading hybrid teams.

2.2.2 Leadership styles in relation to gender

Having established a basic understanding of leadership styles, it is now appropriate to review the literature on leadership styles and their relationship with gender.

When it comes to the relationship between gender and transformational or transactional leadership styles, some studies imply that the inherent qualities of females are closely linked to the transformational leadership (Taleb, 2010; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Especially highlighted is the transformational characteristic of individual consideration, where the leader focuses on mentoring and developing the employees and paying attention to their needs, as being closely linked to the stereotypical feminine personality (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). The claim that women are more transformational than men is for

instance supported by Eagly et al. (2003) and Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) who found that women indeed were slightly more transformational in their leadership style than male leaders. In support of these conclusions, the authors describe how women in the norming sample actually did score significantly higher than men on perceived effectiveness. When interpreting these results, the authors suggest that one reason for women scoring higher on transformational leadership may be the tendency for the female gender role to strengthen more feminine styles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

The fact that previous studies indicate that women have a tendency to use the transformational leadership style, may be due to several factors according to Kark et al. (2012). These factors include for instance the fact that some components of transformational leadership are related to "masculine" characteristics, while other components are perceived as "feminine". Therefore, women can naturally possess some of the characteristics that are required for the transformational leadership style. Findings from a study made by Hackman et al. (1992) revealed that there indeed is a significant positive relationship between both "feminine" and "masculine" factors and the transformational leadership, but that there was a somewhat stronger positive relationship between "feminine" factors and transformational leadership. This may also be a contributing factor to why women scored higher on the transformational leadership style. However, as women sometimes behave in stereotypical "masculine" ways, and men in "feminine" ways, Kark et al. (2012) suggest that the crucial factor in establishing a leader's transformational leadership style is the perception of the leader's gender-role characteristic as "feminine", "masculine", androgynous" or "undifferentiated", rather than the leader's biological sex. Transformational leadership requires a gender balance that consists of strong and positive "feminine" as well as "masculine" characteristics (Kark et al., 2012). This relates to the androgynous behavior, described in section 3.1, that is high on both "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics.

This assumption is also confirmed in recent findings that showed that the inspirational motivation component of transformational leadership was seen as more important for men than women when it came to promotion to leadership positions, while individual consideration seemed to be more important when it came to the promotion of women to leadership positions. These findings furthermore indicate that people relate some components of transformational leadership as "masculine" (e.g assertive and directive), while others as "feminine" (e.g sensitive and caring). This highlights the notion that individuals who act in

both "feminine" and "masculine" manners are more likely to be seen as transformational (Vinkenburg et al., 2011).

2.3 Organizational culture

Much has been written about organizational culture over the years which has created a myriad of definitions with many different approaches used to describe the phenomenon. Schein (2004) defines culture as a pattern of basic assumptions that are invented, discovered and developed by a group of individuals as they learn how to cope with external adaptation and internal integration. It is the shared patterns of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and values that are formed based on the groups' shared experiences and learning (Schein, 2010). On that note, Wiener (1988) claims that most researchers within the field of organizational culture indeed agree on the fact that shared values are a key element in the definition of culture. However, Van den Berg and Wilderom (2004) states that organizational culture also should be considered in terms of work practices. The authors therefore formulated their own definition of culture as "shared perceptions of organisational work practices within organisational units that may differ from other organisational units" (Van den Berg & Wilderom, 2004, p. 571).

The literature presents different types of culture classifications. One distinction is made by Wallach (1983), who separates between three different types of organizational cultures; the bureaucratic, innovative and supportive. Even though most companies are a combination of these three, one is usually more seen as being dominant and pervasive than the rest (Silverthorne, 2004). The first, bureaucratic culture, is characterized as being highly hierarchical and is usually based on control and power. This type of organization is furthermore described as being regulated, structured, procedural and cautious. The second culture, innovative, is instead described as being exciting and dynamic. This type of environment is highly creative and filled with challenge and risk. The third and last culture is the supportive environment, characterized as being warm, open and friendly. An organization whose organizational culture is highly supportive is furthermore possessing qualities such as trust, safety, encouragement, relationship-orientation and collaboration (Wallach, 1983). According to Silverthorne (2004), the employees working in an organization characterized as being highly bureaucratic had the lowest levels of job satisfaction and commitment. An innovative culture was placed next highest, right after the supportive culture where the employees showed the highest level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Creating an organizational culture that attracts and retains top talents has become a significant investment for many organizations, and has often been used as a competitive advantage (Evans, 2022). However, the COVID-19 pandemic put the power of organizational culture to the test - with the 2021 Global Culture Survey by PwC (2021) revealing that 41% of 3200 survey respondents worldwide felt that maintaining the culture was more difficult during the pandemic. This is highly concerning, because if employees lose their sense of connectedness to the organization, their duties become mere chores, and they may no longer feel invested in the organization's long-term success or the role they play in advancing it (Van Pottelsberghe, 2022). With many employees adjusting to hybrid work, it is therefore vital for organizations to rebuild and tailor their organizational culture for today's scattered workforce (Evans, 2022).

The hybrid work setting has therefore shown to challenge organizational cultures in different ways. In strong organizational cultures, the values and beliefs are widely shared and held. In order to be able to accomplish this, sufficient socialization is necessary (Trevor & Holweg, 2023). Hirsch (2021) implies that the lack of consistent and uninterrupted connections of hybrid work leads to weaker natural connections and hence makes it more difficult for relationships and organizational culture to be maintained. Much of the research in this area therefore concludes that relationship-building, regular and strong communication and in fostering team building and connections among the employees are being crucial when working in hybrid environments (Hirsch, 2021; Van Pottelsberghe, 2022; Summerfield, 2022; Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023). Relationships have always been important, but Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik (2023) implies that it today means even more. By focusing on close collaboration, a sense of belonging and purpose can be fostered amongst the employees, enabling the culture to spread among both those working hybridly and in-office. At the same time, it will connect the entire team to the organization's success and the role each member plays in achieving it (Van Pottelsberghe, 2022).

Another issue when it comes to hybrid work regards trust. Despite the availability of video communication tools, they are unable to replicate the level of depth and quality that face-to-face interactions offer. Thus, not only is it harder to build trust when working more remotely, but online communication can also lead to potential misunderstandings that further erode trust (Hirsch, 2021). Besides having a focus on relationship-building in order to foster

trust, Bernstein (1988) suggests four strategies in order to foster an organization of trust. The first is participation, which is the establishment of independent work where the employees are included in the decision-making. The second strategy is delegation, which regards the assignment of tasks to teams, and then giving them the freedom to accomplish those in their own way. Communication is another effective strategy in creating a culture of trust. Bernstein (1988) states that two-way information sharing is important, where the leader supplies their teams with all the information they need to get the job done well. Lastly, the strategy of evaluation includes periodic review of results and accomplishments.

In addition to this, the hybrid work setting also requires an extended focus on well-being (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023; Evans, 2022). Sparks et al. (2001) stresses the importance of well-being in relation to working hours (in regulating hours to avoid burnout) and work control (in offering work environment flexibility). On a similar note, Ryff (1989) implies that environmental mastery and personal growth is important for employee well-being. The author defines environmental mastery as the individual's ability to decide which environment is most suitable for his or her psychic conditions, similar to what Sparks et al (2001) refers to as work control, and personal growth as the act of developing one's potential (Ryff, 1989).

Taking this into consideration, it appears that the literature in this area provides strong support for the necessity for creating a supportive organizational culture, with characteristics such as trust, encouragement, relationship-orientation and collaboration (Wallach, 1983), when it comes to hybrid work settings.

2.3.1 The impact of leadership on organizational culture

One of the most important roles of organizational leaders is to create and maintain organizational culture. During the first stages of business creation, leaders are shaping the organizational culture through their decisions, which are based on their own beliefs and values (Schein, 1990). Thereafter, effective leaders have the ability to continue shaping the culture through their behaviors, what they focus their attention on, how they react to crises and how they reward and punish the employees. However, this is also true the other way around, in that the culture affects the leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Over time, when the organization matures and when the beliefs and values have been well established within the organization, the leadership is also shaped by the culture (Schein, 1990). For instance, a strong organizational culture who values autonomy at the lower levels, can prevent the higher

levels from exhibiting increased personal power at the expense of the lower levels (Ball & Avolio, 1993). Schein (2004) describes the relationship between these two concepts as an ongoing interplay, where the leadership shapes the organizational culture, which in turn also is shaped by the developed organizational culture.

Additionally, as new employees are hired into the organization, they will also have an impact on the culture, even though organizations often hire individuals who have similar values to those in the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Therefore, "it is incumbent upon the leaders in the organization to view the development of assumptions and values as an evolutionary process - a process by which the organization and its membership periodically question its assumptions and change them if the conditions warrant such change" (Bass & Avolio, 1993, p.114).

In a study made by Kawatra & Krishnan (2004), the authors examined what type of culture that leaders with high feminine and transformational traits tend to create. As the authors implies that the transformational leadership is perceived to be much feminine, their focus was on specifically feminine traits. The results showed that feminine leadership was found to be team-oriented, collaborative, and people-oriented cultures. This study also showed that femininity reduced results-orientation, which the authors implies could mean that feminine leaders are putting less focus on the goal and more attention to aspects such as group processes or individual needs.

2.4. Conclusion of literature review and proposed framework

The trend of hybrid work has led to significant changes in organizational culture, including the need for a more relationship-oriented approach, focusing on trust (Hirsch, 2021), well-being (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023; Evans, 2022), and remote collaboration (Hirsch, 2021; Van Pottelsberghe, 2022; Summerfield, 2022; Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023). This is closely linked to the description of the supportive organizational culture, presented by Wallach (1983), that possesses qualities such as trust, warmth, friendly, relationship-orientation and collaboration.

Research is also suggesting transformational leadership to be especially well-suited in the hybrid work setting (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012; Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023; Pauleen,

2003). Transformational leaders focus on building relationships and trust within their teams, which is particularly effective in a hybrid work environment where employees may feel disconnected and isolated from their team and organization (Huang et al., 2010). Furthermore, the literature also indicates that transformational leaders often behave androgynous, meaning that they behave in both "masculine" and "feminine" manners (Kark et al., 2012). That is, they are assertive and direct while also being sensitive and caring (Vinkenburg et al., 2011).

These conclusions are in the proposed framework connected, where the individual behavior of the leader influences his or her ability of effective leadership style, that in turn affects the organizational culture. In hybrid settings, it seems preferable to behave androgynous and practice transformational leadership in order to develop a supportive organizational culture. Therefore the proposed framework is:
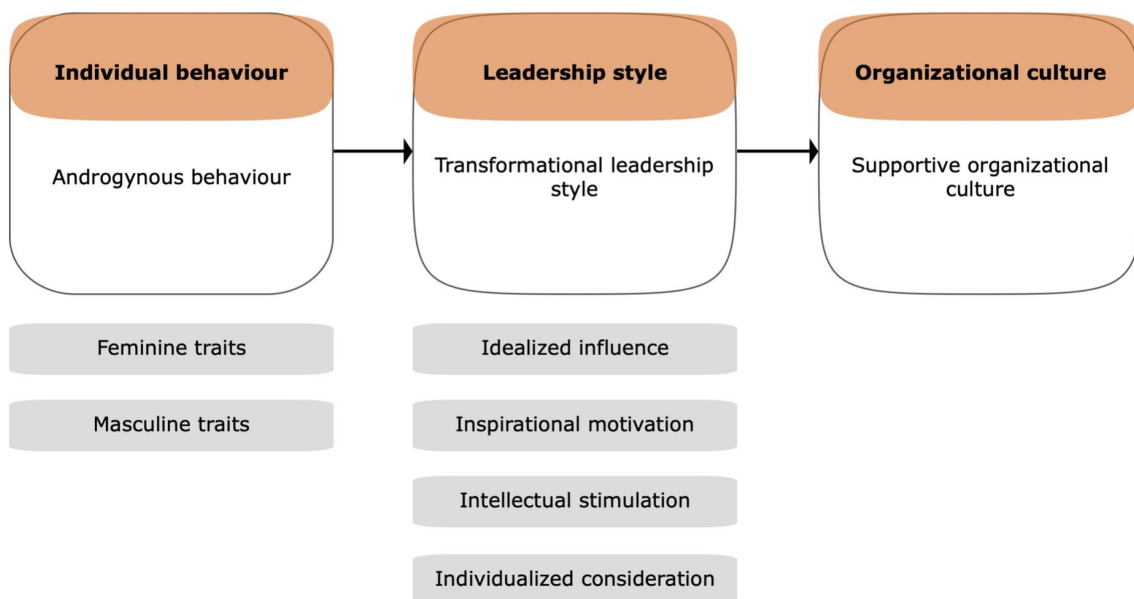
Figure 5. Proposed framework based on Bem (1974), Avolio & Bass (1985), Wallach, (1983)

Furthermore, the literature pointed out a loop between leadership style and organizational culture. As the literature suggested that there is an ongoing interplay between these two, where the leadership shapes the culture, which in turn also is shaped by the developed organizational culture (Schein, 2004), this seemed important to mention in relation to the

proposed framework. However, this will not be of main focus in this particular research. Rather, the focus of this research will be on the linear process, illustrated in Figure 5.

3. Methods

This chapter starts with explaining the chosen research strategy and design for this study. The aim is to provide the readers with an understanding of how the study has been conducted and why the specific strategy and design seemed most appropriate. This is followed by a description of the data collection, sampling and an explanation of how the data has been analyzed. Lastly, the chapter also provides the reader with a description of how this particular study has been conducted in accordance with ethical principles.

3.1 Research strategy

Before deciding the strategy of the research, it is important to understand what type of relationship there is between theory and research. The two primary research methods of comparing reality with theories are the deductive and the inductive approach, and these differ both in terms of implementation and in suitability. The inductive research method of comparing reality with theories starts with observations and then goes to generalization, which can be seen as the opposite of the deductive approach. The choice between these therefore depends on whether the research starts from theory or empirical data. Given these differences in implementation, their suitability also differs. In general, the deductive approach is associated with quantitative research while the inductive approach is typically associated with qualitative research (Bell et al., 2019).

As this research aims at establishing an understanding of how gender of leaders impacts the development of a supportive culture, a qualitative research strategy was considered most suitable. Hennink et al. (2020, p. 17) explains that "the purpose of qualitative research is to seek a contextualized understanding of phenomena, explain behaviour and beliefs, identify processes and understand the context of people's experiences". The usage of qualitative research strategy created a thorough exploration of how gender impacts the culture, from the expressed behaviors and beliefs by the respondents. Additionally, as the data collected aimed at describing *how* gender of organizational leaders impact the development of a supportive organizational culture, rather than measuring it, a qualitative focus of data collection was

determined to be best suited. This is in line with what Hennink et al. (2020) explains in that the purpose of qualitative research often regards *understanding why, how, what is the process,* and *what are the influences or context.* Furthermore, since the hybrid work settings still is considered a rather new trend with few best practices, it was more valuable to allow the participants to respond using their own words, rather than allowing them to choose from a number of fixed answers as in the case of quantitative methods. It is also considered more flexible in nature, which allowed me to modify the research as new insights or questions arose along the way (Bell et al., 2019).

This qualitative research strategy opened up for the inductive approach (Bell et al., 2019). However, regarding the area of investigation, established theories within gender, leadership and organizational culture already exist. Therefore, as the aim of this research is not to develop a new theory, a complete inductive approach of comparing theories with reality was not found appropriate. However, given the exploratory stance of this research and that this research aims to explore a broad and rather complex phenomenon, a complete deductive approach was not considered to be appropriate either, as it could limit the potential for discovering new insights and understandings (Bell et al., 2019). Hence, the approach used in this research is the abductive approach, a combination of the deductive and inductive approaches. The focus of this approach is on the interplay between the empirical data and theories (Lind, 2019). Since the research phenomena of interest in this study is related to the new trend of hybrid work as a consequence of the pandemic, a relatively recent event, there is still a lot to discover that has not yet been researched on. Even though there is research about hybrid working, organizational culture, and female and male leadership styles, there is a profound gap in the research about the connection between these. This strengthened the argument for using an abductive approach as this research aims at exploring phenomena where previous theories within the area are rather scarce. By moving back and forth between reality and what exists regarding literature within the separate areas, this more adaptable approach allowed theory to develop during the research process which ultimately led to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Bell et al., 2019).

3.2 Research design

Research design can be described as the overall research plan for collecting and analyzing data and is ultimately affected by the chosen research strategy. There are several research

designs to choose from, where the comparative design was found to be the most appropriate for this study. It implies that we can understand a social phenomena in a better way when it is compared with two or more contrasting cases. Moreover, the comparative design can also be applied to the qualitative research strategy. When this happens, the form is of a multiple-case study and usually compares two or more organizations or people (Bell et al., 2019). By comparing several different organizations and female and male leaderships, the aim was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic being studied. The multi-case study also helped to identify patterns that may not have been apparent if studying only one organization.

Bell et al (2019) implies that this type of research design also may help the researcher to gain new insights for further investigations. By identifying similarities and differences between several different organizations and leaders, new ideas may be identified along the way that were not considered at first, and that the existing theory is missing. This way of working is furthermore closely related to the abductive method that was chosen for this research.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Primary data collection

For the primary data collection, interviews were conducted. According to Bell et al. (2019) this is the most commonly used way to collect primary data in qualitative research. On a similar note, Alvehus (2019) implies that interviews almost appear as an essential method when it comes to trying to find out how people think, feel and act in different situations. However, interviews can be conducted in different ways (Alvehus, 2019). The two major types of interviews are the unstructured and the semi-structured interview, and the choice between these two ultimately depends on the research being done (Bell et al., 2019). Because of the multiple-case study research design chosen for this study, semi-structured interviews were preferred as some structure was needed to ensure cross-case compatibility. The choice of semi-structured interviews was further based on the fact that the investigation had a fairly clear focus from the beginning. By having prepared some questions in an interview guide, it ensured that the more specific topics were being addressed and answered (Bell et al., 2019). However, additional questions were sometimes asked and these differed between the interviews, depending on what type of response that was given from the interviewee. The key themes that were followed in the semi-structured interviews were presented in an interview

guide, where more details can be found under section 3.3.1.2. The full interview guide can furthermore be found in Appendix 1.

3.3.1.1 Sampling

In this research, the sampling was purposive. That is, the respondents were chosen based on their relevance for the study where the research question of the study gave indications on what type of units were needed (Bell et al., 2019). In line with this, the selected units for this research were organizations with offices in Sweden. However, as organizations can not be interviewed per se, the actual units of sample were leaders chosen based on the inclusion criterias. There was also a snowball sampling, a type of purposive sampling (Bell et al., 2019). That is, the first contact was asked to refer me to someone else of his/hers choice that also met the inclusion criterias of this research.

The aim was to study an even number of leaders, in order to get an even distribution of female and male leaders. Two types of criterions for the sampling were constructed. First, the team must have incorporated a hybrid work model to some extent. The emphasis on teams is due to the understanding that entire organizations may not have the possibility to incorporate a hybrid work model completely, as some types of teams have to be on site in order to execute their job tasks. Hence, the criterion is for the leader to run a team whose work is hybrid, regardless of how the rest of the organization is working. Secondly, the leader must work with professional teams. My personal definition of this is teams who are doing more advanced work and that may require a higher degree of education. This criterion was chosen on the basis that the leadership role may differ considerably in regards to what type of teams they are leading. By interviewing similar types of teams, it ensured a more fair view of the phenomenon.

To summarize the criteria for the respondents that were considered relevant for this research, there was two types of interviewees:
- Female leader for a professional team whose work is hybrid.
- Male leader for a professional team whose work is hybrid.

Some may argue that the perspective of employees also is important in this matter. However, as this research is specifically aiming to understand the influence gender has on leaders

actions and behaviors in developing a supportive culture, hence more of an input than output approach, the perspective of employees was not considered essential for this specific topic.

In Table 2 below, an overview of the respondents interviewed in this study is presented:

Respondent	Gender	Hybrid work arrangement	Medium for interview	Date of interview	Lenght of interview
M1	Male	30% remotely	Teams, e-mail	20th of March	47 min
M2	Male	30% remotely	Zoom	13th of April	46 min
M3	Male	2-3 days/week remotely	Zoom	19th of April	32 min
M4	Male	1-2 days/week remotely	Zoom	21st of April	29 min
M5	Male	1-2 days/week remotely	Zoom	21st of April	54 min
F1	Female	Allows working 49% remotely	Zoom	5th of April	56 min
F2	Female	2-3 days/week remotely	Zoom, e-mail	11th of April	34 min
F3	Female	2 days/week remotely	Zoom	12th of April	56 min
F4	Female	2 days/week remotely	Zoom	18th of April	53 min
F5	Female	Very flexible	Zoom	18th of April	64 min

Table 2. Overview of interviewees and interviews

3.3.1.2 Interview guide

The semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview guide, consisting of broader themes around which the interview was centered. When conducting the interview guide, it was important to consider what was needed to know in order for the research question to be answered (Bell et al., 2019). The structure of the interview guide was therefore following the proposed framework and the reviewed literature. According to Patel and Davidson (2011), it is up to the researcher to connect the conversation to these during the interview, both in order to facilitate the conversation and to make sure that the specific topics are being addressed and answered. Additionally, all of the selected questions for the interview guide were formulated with the research question in mind, which is according to Bell et al, (2019) important in order to ensure suitable interview questions.

The interview guide starts with some introducing questions that aim to give background information about the interviewee's team and work situation. Following the introducing questions, the interviewee was asked questions that aimed at understanding their individual character. Thereafter, the themes were leadership style and strategies for developing a supportive organizational culture in hybrid settings. Furthermore, as the research question aims to investigate how female and male leadership impacts the development of a supportive organizational culture during hybrid work, both indirect and direct questions were necessary. The indirect questions allowed the interviewee to provide his or her personal view on the discussed subject, while the direct questions instead aimed at getting more straightforward information about certain topics.

Lastly, before conducting the interviews the interview guide was discussed with both my supervisors in order to ensure their relevance for this study. This resulted in some slight changes before being fully satisfied.

3.3.1.3 Conducting the interviews

The interviews took place via video meetings. There was obvious time and cost savings advantages for the researcher related to this choice of data collection (Bell et al., 2019), as interviewees were geographically dispersed in Sweden. This is also true for the interviewees', and opened up for the possibility of getting more participants, as many experience video meetings as a more flexible and time saving option on their end as well. Another benefit when conducting interviews online is that respondents were able to be flexible regarding their choice of environment (Bell et al., 2019). Bell et al. (2019) states that the environment indeed is an important factor during interviews, as respondents tend to speak more freely if they are in the right environment. However, under other circumstances, it would also have been valuable to do observations, since it would have allowed for triangulation. However, since the very focus of this research was to develop an understanding of approaches and strategies used by organizational leaders in developing a supportive culture, it was not considered necessary for this particular research. As mentioned earlier, there is more of an input focus, than output focus.

There are however some technological problems with the use of different online mediums, such as lack of familiarity with different digital tools, that needed to be considered (Bell et

al., 2019). As seen in Table 2, the platform used for online interviewing in this research was Zoom. Some respondents did not have previous experience or knowledge about this platform, which resulted in some respondents taking longer to connect to the meeting. However, this was not considered harmful for the data collection, since it was resolved promptly by all respondents. By trying to make sure that both the interviewee and the researcher was located in a calm and quiet environment, with a stable wifi-connection, the aim was also to overcome potential technical quality and flow issues as well (Bell et al., 2019).

As seen in Table 2, two of the ten interviews were also partly conducted through e-mail. The reason for this was either that the respondent had insufficient time to finish the whole interview, or that additional questions had surfaced along the research process. This is what Bell et al. (2019) refers to asynchronous online interviewing, as the exchanges of communication are not in real time. Even though this type of interviewing can generate more thorough and thoughtful data that tends to be more considered and grammatically correct, it is also criticized for losing spontaneity. However, as the interview questions sent through e-mail only considered a few additional questions, where the main part of the interview still were taking place in real time through synchronous online interviews (Bell et al., 2019), it was not considered unfavorable for this research.

3.4 Data analysis

Transcribing recorded interviews is the most common practice after conducting them (Bell et al., 2019). Even though there are some potential disadvantages with recordings, as it may limit the respondents ability to be open while answering questions (Alvehus, 2019), it was considered necessary in order to not miss out on important information or lose the context of the answers. The risk with note taking is that the researcher writes down what he or she hears, which is sometimes not always consistent with what has actually been said by the interviewee (Alvehus, 2019), which further made recordings more appropriate. However, it was the interviewee who ultimately decided what method he or she felt comfortable with. Therefore, the respondents were asked if they approved recordings at the beginning of each interview, which they all ended up agreeing on. However, it was also found valuable to partly take notes during the interviews, as it made the transcribing process easier and less time consuming. It also functioned as a safety, as technology sometimes does not work as intended.

Since the empirical data in qualitative research most often are not standardized and are expressed verbally, it puts a different type of demand on the researcher to process and present it, than in quantitative research (Lind, 2019). There are several types of methods for qualitative data analysis and the one used in this research was thematic analysis. Since there were a total of ten interviews, with time spans between 29 minutes to 64 minutes, it resulted in a large data set. According to Nowell et al. (2018) the thematic analysis proves helpful to summarize the main characteristics of a large data set, as it forces the researcher to adopt a well-structured approach to manage the data, which made it the most appropriate method for this study. Since the focus of this research is to investigate similarities and differences between male and female leadership styles, the thematic analysis further allowed me to capture these (Bell et al., 2019).

After the collection of data, transcription of the recorded interviews was necessary. Bell et al. (2019) state that one hour of an interview equals around five to six hours of transcription. Therefore, different online transcription tools were used to facilitate this process. These were: Microsoft Word, Otter and Avolio. However, as the transcribed material sometimes presented inaccuracies, all transcribed data was carefully reviewed before starting the coding process. I also read through the data, sometimes several times, to get a good sense of the content. This is in line with what Braund and Clarke (2006) suggests, who recommends researchers to read it through at least once before starting the coding process to get familiar with the content. One of the main reasons for this is that when researchers become familiar with all aspects of the data, it can influence their ideas and help them identify potential patterns more easily. This was also a good way to get a sense of what was important and what might be unnecessary information for the study. Therefore, all information that was not considered necessary was deleted.

To identify initial codes, I searched for words or phrases in the text that stood out and these were then assigned codes. These initial codes were either based on the actual words used by the respondents or my own interpretation of the data. This was followed by sorting and gathering the codes into themes. However, the choice of how to identify themes is strongly related to the chosen research strategy. With an inductive approach, the themes are strongly linked to the data itself, whereas with an deductive approach, the themes are rather guided by theory (Nowell et al., 2017). Since this research has an abductive approach, the themes were

partly guided by existing theories, but not exclusively. The theory was therefore used as a supporting function, but with the aim of not limiting new discoveries.

All themes were later revised in order to be sure that they truly reflected the content of the data. This resulted in me deleting and moving some codes before being truly satisfied. This was followed by defining and naming the themes. The naming of the themes was carefully executed, and it required me to rename them several times in order to be sure that they truly reflected the collected data within them. To increase the likelihood of developing credible findings, it is necessary to allocate sufficient time to this phase (Nowell et al., 2017). It was furthermore to my understanding that thematic analysis is an iterative process (Bell et al., 2019), where I needed to revise as the research process progressed.

3.5 Ethics

In this research, a consent form was sent out to all respondents prior to the interviews. This consent form presented the research purpose, and included information about confidentiality, anonymity, opportunity of withdrawal and the opportunity to deny answering certain questions. This consent form was further read and signed by all respondents.

The discussions about ethics in business research is furthermore usually broken down to four areas. These are about harm to participants, lack of consent, invasion of privacy and deception (Bell et al., 2019). Regarding the first area, Bell et al. (2019) states the importance of confidentiality of records and the anonymity of participants. In this research, the interviewees were promised to be kept anonymous, as stated in the consent form. Information that is presented is the gender of the interviewee, and work setting. Name of the organization or participant, age and more specific information are not mentioned. No detailed information about the specific interviewees was therefore presented, and hence no information that could be traced back to the respondent. The reason for this was to make sure that the participants felt safe to talk openly and honestly about the subjects. It was important that they did not feel uncomfortable talking about their true workplace experiences or feel like their answers in some way could impact their position or reputation in the organization.

The second issue, related to lack of informed consent, regards the importance of providing the interviewees with as much information about the research as possible so that they can

make a decision whether or not they want to participate (Bell et al., 2019). In line with this, the interviewees were provided with a description about the subject together with the consent form when reaching out, in order to give them the opportunity to participate or not. Additionally, there was also an introduction before the interview, in order to make sure that the participants truly understood what it was about. Moreover, this issue also includes that interviewees should be informed if recording equipment will be used (Bell et al., 2019). They were therefore asked if they consent to being recorded, and promised that the recordings would be deleted after the completion of the research.

The third issue, invasion of privacy, is closely related to the principle of harm to participants. Even with consent, there might arise issues regarding for example certain interview questions. Often, it is based on a feeling that certain questions are too private or sensitive to talk about (Bell et al., 2019). The aim was that anonymity and confidentiality would allow the participants to talk more freely about the subject. However, it was still important to give the interview the opportunity to withdraw if needed (Bell et al., 2019), which was stated in the consent form that they had received prior to the interview.

Lastly, deception relates to the research being presented as something other than what it is (Bell et al., 2019). The aim was therefore to be as transparent as possible already from the beginning when introducing the research but also by promising the participants to get access to the final work when it was completed.

3.6 Limitations

A common limitation that is often discussed with qualitative research designs is the challenge of generalizing the findings (Bell et al., 2019). As this research concludes ten interviews, it is therefore acknowledged that it could have benefited from involving more respondents. However, it is also important to note that this does not necessarily make the findings less significant. Instead, the goal of qualitative research is often to provide a rich and detailed understanding of a specific phenomenon or context, rather than to make generalizations (Bell et al., 2019). Therefore, even if these findings may not be generalizable, they can still provide important and valuable insights in this specific area.

I was also aware of the limitation in that people sometimes do not provide accurate information because of what is desirable. That is, there might be expressed leadership approaches and strategies that are more in line with how these leaders desire to act, rather than their actual approaches and strategies. This could have been addressed by interviewing the employees reporting to them, to find eventual discrepancies. However, to address this limitation, certain questions in the interview guide were structured to coach the leaders to provide specific examples of their choices, strategies or approaches. Hopes were that this approach would help to minimize the potential impact of this limitation.

It is also worth mentioning the limitation of only verbal interviews. Bell et al. (2019) states that researchers also must rely on observations. It is acknowledged that observations may have been effective in addressing the above-mentioned limitation of leaders tending to discuss what they desire rather than what they actually do. However, as this research aimed at investigating the hybrid work setting, it might have been difficult to fully observe the leadership behaviors in an effective way.

Another limitation regards the fact that the interviews had a big variation of lengths, as seen in Table 2. The large variation in interview lengths is explained by varying talkativeness of the respondents, as well as some respondents having time constraints that limited their ability to fully participate in the interview. This resulted in some respondents being more short in their answers, while others had the chance to give more vivid and full answers. However, this was not considered a big issue, as the information gathered still provided meaningful and valuable insights to the research.

Lastly, I also acknowledge the limitation of assuming the gender of respondents, as it may not accurately reflect their true gender identity. That is, even though many individuals identify as their biological sex, there are also those who identify as the opposite of their biological sex, non-binary or other identities. To offer the respondents the option to identify their gender on their own, or to use a broader gender framework, is furthermore something that can be taken into consideration in future research.

4. Empirical findings

In this chapter, the empirical findings from the primary data collection is presented. The chapter will be started with an overview of the overarching themes and collected codes, providing the reader with a preview of the content that follows. The findings will then be presented in the same structure as the proposed framework, starting with the findings regarding gender followed by leadership style and strategies for developing a supportive organizational culture. Furthermore, a summary table of the respondents answers will be provided at the beginning of each area, to facilitate the reader's comprehension of the content presented.

4.1 Themes and codes

Figure 6 below shows the three overarching themes together with the in total 39 codes.
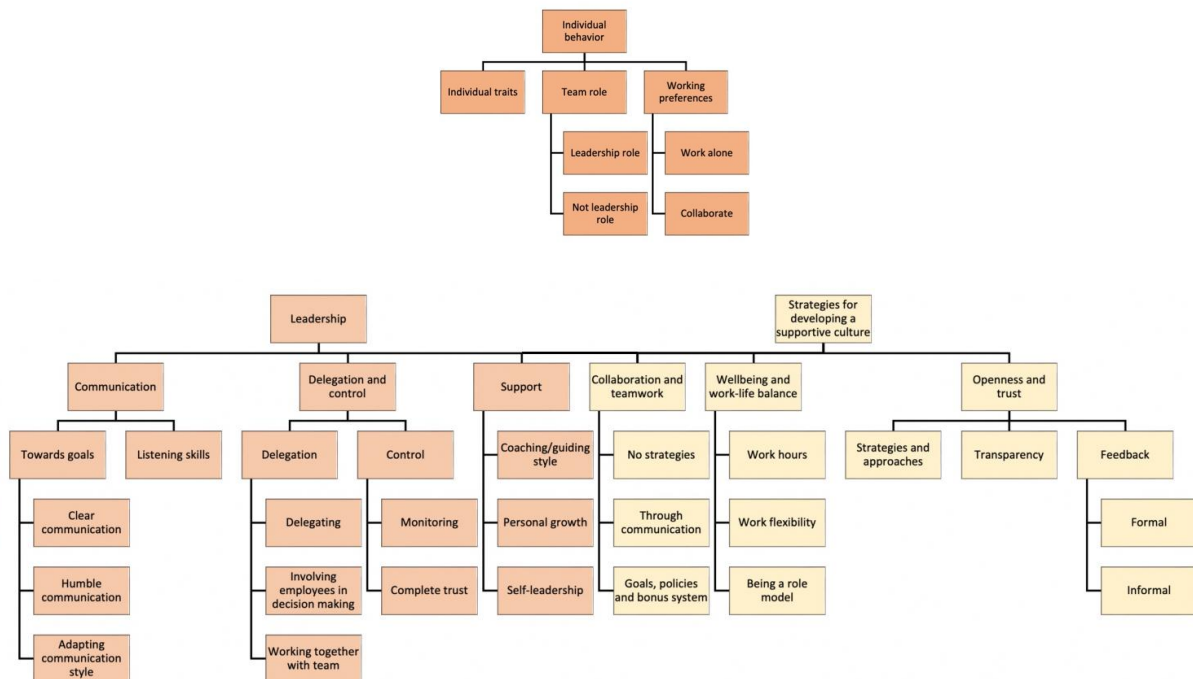
Figure 6. Overarching themes and related codes

As seen in the above figure, the overarching themes "leadership" and "strategies for developing a supportive culture" are connected. This is due to the fact that many of the strategies used in developing a supportive culture ultimately also impacts the leader's

leadership style. That is, they are seen as being intertwined. This is further taken into consideration in the final analysis and conclusions.

4.2 Individual behavior

When it comes to individual behavior, the content of the interviews is divided into three main areas. These are: individual traits, team role and working preferences.

The first part of the interviews was concerning the interviewees' individual behaviors. Common individual traits that were mentioned among all the respondents, describing how they perceive themselves as individuals, were traits such as curious, fair, passionate and positive. The male leaders were however having a higher tendency of describing themselves as straightforward and goal-oriented. This view was shared amongst respondents M1, M2, M3 and M5. Two out of five male leaders also described themselves as being delegating, something that none of the female leaders mentioned. However, M3 also described himself as relationship-oriented, something that none of the other male respondents did. Also being noted is the fact that the male respondent M4 did not respond in accordance to any of the commonly shared traits. He, instead, described himself as fair, forgiving, passionate, curious and courageous. The more common traits described by the female leaders, on the other hand, were instead traits such as kind, people-oriented and good listener. However, female leaders F2 and F4 were also describing themselves as goal-oriented. F3 further also described herself as dominant, something that none of the other respondents did.

When asked about their usual team role, i.e what kind of role they usually take on in groups when solving tasks, the male respondents M1, M3, M4 and M5 all agreed on the fact that they usually want to be in charge in some way and normally takes on a leadership role in groups. When it came to the female leaders, respondents F2 and F3 preferred having a more listening approach, where they preferred taking in the team's perspectives on the matter and collaborating together to accomplish the task. F1 underlined the importance of making people feel at ease and having fun, and rather saw herself as someone who tries to think outside the box to accomplish the task. The female respondents F4 and F5, on the other hand, were describing themselves as initiative takers and had no problem taking on leadership roles. Additionally, female leader F4 described herself as dominant and someone who directs the group towards a solution.

"We can't just go on and discuss endlessly. Yes, it's nice, but we have to come to a result. I'm heard and seen when you have to do a job." - F4.

When asked about their work preferences, i.e if they prefer working on their own or in collaboration with others, the majority appreciated collaboration and teamwork in accomplishing tasks. That is, M1, M2, M4, F1, F2, F4 and F5 all agreed that they prefer working together with others rather than alone. F3 expressed an equal preference, while respondents M3 and M5 preferred working alone. That is, even though the majority agreed on the fact that they prefer collaborating, male respondents were slightly more inclined to prefer working on their own than the female respondents.

4.3 Leadership style

When it comes to leadership style, the content of the interviews is divided into three main areas. These are: communication, delegation and control, and support.

4.3.1 Communication

When it comes to communication towards goals, the majority of respondents, M1, M2, M3, M5, F1, F3 and F4, expressed that they communicate clear demands and expectations in order to help the employees move forward. This enables the employees to be clear on what is expected of them.

"If you don't have any clear demands or expectations on yourself, it's difficult to follow up. It's easier to follow up when you're sitting next to each other all the time, but when sitting remote, I think it becomes even more important" - M2

"And when working from home, I believe it needs to be clear what is expected of them and what needs to be done. Because it is harder to communicate when people are at home. So I think it needs to be more clear, and more communications going on back and forward within the team" - M5

M3 also states that it is important for the employees to see the actual value that is generated. All the female respondents additionally talked about the importance of clearly explaining why certain decisions are being made and how the team benefits from them. At the same

time, the female respondents value the trait of being humble, to listen, and being able to understand people when moving forward. There was a strong emphasis on active listening and in taking sufficient time to comprehend the perspectives of the team.

Moreover, the interviewees M2, M4, F3 and F4 also highlighted the importance of being able to change and adapt the communication style towards the different team members. Both when it comes to differences in how individuals receive information, but also in how to communicate instructions and guidance towards different personalities. On a similar note, both M2 and F4 strongly believed that their leadership style needs to be adaptable towards where the group is in its development. M2 explains how it initially needs to be more of a clear and direct communication style, so that everyone in the team understands what needs to be done and what is expected of them. When the group has matured, the leadership needs to adapt towards being more coaching.

Something else that was mentioned in several interviews was the importance of listening. This topic was directly highlighted by F1, F2, F3, F4, F5 and M3. They expressed the importance of being patient and actively listening to the team's thoughts and concerns about different subjects. The respondents who spent most time talking about this were the female leaders F2 and F3.

"You need to listen to people. You need to interact together. That's why it's so important that not just one person steps in and, you know, sets all the rules. It's very important to have the buy-in from the rest of the team in any group that you're working with" - F3.

4.3.2 Delegation and control

All of the respondents described the decision making within their team to be a combination of both set goals and an involvement of the employees. That is, there are set overarching goals, but it's the team together who decides on how to reach them. In line with this, many respondents agreed on the fact that employee involvement in the decision making process is crucial for promoting motivation within the team. Additionally, it was also expressed that it is important to involve team members to provide them with a sense of empowerment and to ensure that they feel valued in their work and in the organization.

Furthermore, in several interviews the term *delegation* came up. Male respondents M1, M2 and M5 described how delegation is a natural part of their leadership. When it came to the female leaders, delegation was only directly mentioned by F1 and F2, but with different approaches to it. Female respondent F1 describes that she is used to delegate. However, she also stressed the importance of being able to step back when necessary, at the same time as being close when needed.

"I think my work is really to find your motivation and get you to want to do things. So in that sense, I'm stepping back, you know. At the same time, it's important enough to not step back if someone is being brave enough to challenge themselves. [...] I think it's super important to make sure that if something happens, I need to be there very tight because if you encourage people to jump, you need to jump with them. Otherwise they will never do it" - F1

On the contrary, F2 rather expressed that she needs to learn how to sometimes put the foot down and delegate more. She recognized that she is too kind, and referred to herself as sometimes being too "curling" towards the employees. This means that the employees occasionally do not have to do as much. In the same sentence, she also referred to herself as being a "workaholic". However, even though the term *delegation* did not directly come up in other interviews, it was mentioned in other ways. Female leader F5 for instance described how she doesn't have any issues giving tasks to employees. Female respondent F4 described her leadership role as directing the group forward, where she sets the clear framework that the employees need to follow, however are free to work within, and female F3 described herself as clear in what is needed to be done. Male respondent M3 further expressed that he has a preference for communicating clear deadlines, so that the employees know what is expected of them.

The respondents F1, F2, F3, F5 and M3, additionally put an emphasis on working together with the team in reaching the organizational goals. They expressed that it's important that everyone feels that they are on the same way. According to F1 and F5 this is also based on acknowledging the expertise within the group. That is, they described an understanding of the team members knowing more than themselves in certain areas. The communication therefore takes on a more reasoning-oriented character, as the leaders strive to engage in collaborative reasoning with their team members.

When it came to monitoring the work, many respondents agreed on the fact that hybrid work is more difficult. When everyone is in the office, small talks and check-ins are happening in a more natural manner. By having some employees working from home, it is harder to make sure that everyone is working as they are supposed to. However, those small talks and check-ins at the office were not always expressed as having a monitoring effect, as many respondents also referred to them as moments where they could show their support. If anyone in the team would need assistance with a task, those were the natural moments where that could be brought up. Furthermore, when it came to monitoring work, respondents F1, F3, F4, M1, M3 and M4 all talked about the importance of trust when the work setting is hybrid. Those that expressed complete trust in their team working hybrid, without mentioning other monitoring processes, were respondents F1, F3 and M4. Those who instead did not mention trust, but rather had monitoring tools, were respondents M2, M5, F2 and F5. For the male leader M2, trust is something that comes after a while, as he described himself as a skeptical person. Rather than trusting people until they prove him otherwise, he described himself as someone who has a hard time trusting others in the beginning, and where trust is something that needs to be built over time.

Most control and monitoring tools that were mentioned during the interviews was the usage of different systems, more frequent communications, team meetings and scheduled check-ins. Female respondent F2 also pointed out the importance of video meetings with team members working remotely.

"What has been important for me during the hybrid work [...] is having team meetings so I can see them. Because it's important to know what can hide behind the screen or something like that" - F2.

4.3.3 Support

Even though there was a somewhat varied perspective on how leaders prioritize leading their teams forward, several respondents used terms like coaching and guiding to describe their approach in supporting their teams progress. Male respondent M1 explained that he usually asks questions such as "What's your opinion?" and "How would you do this?", where he gives advice and support rather than direct orders. According to respondent M2, his primary characteristic is being instructional, as he focuses on showing the team how to perform tasks. However, when the team has gained experience, his leadership becomes more coaching in

nature. Female respondents F4 and F5 also described their leadership as being coaching. Additionally, many leaders also expressed a harder time showing that support when working hybrid. Moments that would normally encourage natural coaching from the leader in the office, instead need to be scheduled in meetings, check-ins or calls, for those employees working remotely.

"You need to be more creative when it comes to creating those meeting points" - F1

During the interviews, some respondents also expressed the importance of personal growth. Respondents F1, M2 and M3 talk about personal growth in the sense of encouraging individuals to try new things, think in new ways and challenge themselves. F1 described her main focus as a leader to be on helping the employees to grow. Additionally, M2 talked about monthly feedback sessions where they together go through certain topics, often related to personal development. However, he also mentioned the fact that the current and unstable situation requires all the employees to put the team before themselves, which results in the focus of personal development lacking at the moment.

Self-leadership was also something that was brought up during the interviews, by respondents M1 and F1. They expressed that they expect their team to take responsibilities in their roles and drive their own work forward. F1 puts an emphasis on allowing the employees to challenge themselves in order to develop their self-leadership. In line with this respondent M1 strongly believed in flatter organizations driven by self-leaders and described his goal as making the team redundant of him.

4.4 Strategies for developing a supportive culture

When it comes to the leaders' strategies for developing a supportive organizational culture, the content of the interviews can be divided into three main areas. These are: collaboration and teamwork, well-being and work-life balance, and openness and trust.

Before moving on to the different strategies and approaches, it is worth mentioning that the vast majority of respondents, both male and female leaders, believed that a supportive organizational culture is more important today than ever.

"Yes, since you don't see each other as much, it is important to have a supportive culture because it is harder to catch colleagues if they are not feeling well or if they have too much to do. It is important that you feel seen and part of the company, even if you don't see each other on a daily basis. Everyone in the company is important and everyone must know that, even if you can't pat them on the back in person" - F2

"Yes, I think because it's quite easy otherwise to feel that you are alone. And then you sort of dig yourself down into the hole and then you feel like you're alone. But I think because of that, it's very important to feel like you have people around you that can support you and that see the work that you are doing. So I think that is very important" - M3

4.4.1 Collaboration and teamwork

Respondents F2, M3, M4 and M5 described their culture as already collaborative in nature. That is, most individuals within the organizations collaborate without questioning it. Rather, these leaders would be surprised if the employees would choose another way of working. When asking about their strategies and approaches in creating a collaborative work climate, those leaders who already considered collaboration to be an inherent part of their organization did not communicate any specific strategies to promote it further, as they already view it as an existing part of their culture. When it came to the female leaders, the majority put a strong emphasis on communication as a key driver. Both when it comes to more frequent communications, but also the importance of clear and open communication directed at the importance of collaboration. Additionally, F1 stated that she always tries to find new things to collaborate on. The respondents F3, M1 and M2 are further using goals, policies and bonus systems to promote collaboration and teamwork within their teams.

The respondent who put the most emphasis on collaboration and teamwork was female respondent F3 who explained how she has frequent and open communications within the team where they together try to come up with how to work better together. For instance, they talk much about different types of personalities and different ways of doing things. They also reason about what their strengths and weaknesses are and how they together try to work with those in order to find a good way forward. Respondent F5 was also promoting collaboration and teamwork, but acknowledged that it needs to be improved within her team. She mentioned that they hired help externally in order to be able to improve this type of mindset within her team. However, she also acknowledged the importance of actively working with

that external input, as it requires frequent and regular actions to accomplish teamwork. Which is why she has set up a meeting with the team to discuss it further.

4.4.2 Well-being and work-life balance

When it came to well-being and work-life balance, many of the respondents agreed on the fact that the hybrid work setting sometimes can be more demanding. F1 even expressed a bigger concern about her team's well-being than if people are slacking when working remotely. When asking respondents about their strategies and approaches in ensuring employees well-being and work-life balance, leaders F1 and F5 emphasized the importance of regular and transparent communications. In line with this, respondents F1, F2, F3, F4, F5 and M3 all expressed that they confront those employees who they discover have been working too much, and encourage those to take some time off. However, many leaders also expressed that it is difficult to pick up on which employees are working too much. On this note, female respondent F1 explained that leaders must be more persistent and not hesitate to approach their team members.

On the contrary, M2 does not want to discourage extra work. He described his workplace as having a mainly young workforce who may not face distractions at home, which makes it easier for them to always be connected. He clarified that he doesn't expect the team to work late evenings or weekends, but if they choose to, he doesn't mind.

"It's a behavior that I can like. But you also have to be clear that I don't expect this. So once again, it's about where the expectations are, without inhibiting such behaviors. Because of course if you think it's fun and want to do it, then you should be allowed to do it" - M2

Further theme that came up during the interviews was flexibility in work hours. There was a mutual agreement on the fact that having flexible work hours is beneficial for maintaining a healthy work-life balance and well-being among the employees. It could be to either start the day somewhat later, to take a longer break during lunch, or end the day earlier. According to many respondents, allowing employees to sometimes squeeze in personal matters during the day fosters a sense of well-being and work-life balance. However, several respondents also expressed the importance of respect, indicating that as long as the work is getting done, they are open to offering this sort of flexibility.

Lastly, respondents F1, F3, F4 M3, M4 and M5 also emphasized the importance of being a role-model themselves. By not working late evenings or weekends, they want to encourage their employees to do the same.

"Well, I show them that I'm just a normal person as well. I'm part of the team. I have a different role than they have, but I also need to have a good balance. I wouldn't send emails at 10 o'clock at night or a Saturday or a Sunday. I mean, these are easy things that you can do. Or if I'm out sick, I'm out sick, that's it" -F3

"[...] Be a good example yourself. [...] You have to be the good example of how you lead, how you work, how you show up" - M4

4.4.3 Openness and trust

When asking the respondents about how they work with trust and openness within their team, several different strategies were mentioned. The male respondent M2 explained that trust, for him, means that he's able to delegate things and entrust other people with those tasks, but also to be close and to hold the team's back. Joint exercises is also something he mentioned, as it facilitates both teamwork and trust. For respondent M1 and M2, trust is something that is built with time, as M2, as mentioned earlier, does not trust people easily. For the rest of the male respondents, approaches such as involvement of employees in the decision-making, transparent communication and ensuring alignment were mentioned.

When it came to the female leaders, F1 and F4 explained that they try to be role models. That is, to be open themselves. F1 further stated that it is important to have informal meetings and to be curious about others.

"And I think they were simply confused [about the team meetings] because [...] Every meeting I started off with a check-in that took 50% of that team meeting, and it was everything from: 'Okay so, what is the first car you had?', 'What do you like to eat for breakfast?', 'What is your favorite color?' [...] And then it took a couple of months when I insisted 'Yes this is the check-in'. And slowly they were starting to find it fun and they got to know each other. And I was of course sharing my favorite breakfast as well. So I think you need to invest in that kinda curiosity in each other to create that trust" - F1

For the rest of the female respondents, approaches such as being helpful, present, listening, and working together with the team, rather than above them, were mentioned. Female leader F3 further creates goals to facilitate trust and openness. The goals she described are directed towards the employees being part of the decision making, and collaboration. Respondent F5 also explains that she often refers to the model "spiral of trust", which is a model she often shows and talks about with her team. The model, she explained, implies that once an individual starts sharing something, it gets easier for others to follow and share back. Therefore, she often tries to encourage her team to start being open and sharing, as she believes it creates an effect in the rest of the group.

Transparency was another subject that frequently came up during the interviews. The respondents M1, M2, M4, M5, F1 and F2 all expressed the importance of transparency within the teams. However, the male respondents M2 and M5 described transparency as something that their team should have towards the leader. That is, the team members should be transparent in how work is going so that the leader can be secure in that the work is moving forward. The other respondents that talked about transparency were instead describing it from their own perspective. That is, they described how they try to be as transparent as possible in sharing information so that the team members have all the facts about what is going on.

When it came to feedback, all the respondents expressed using feedback in their work. However, all the male respondents referred to formal and scheduled feedback sessions in this regard. These are usually based on a monthly, quarterly or yearly basis. All the female respondents, however, also referred to feedback that is more informal, that occurs more regularly one-on-one or one-to-team. Female leader F4 believed that providing short but frequent feedback is more effective than waiting for the formal feedback sessions, and therefore tries to follow up directly with her team. On a similar note, respondent F5 tries to give some feedback in every meeting or check-in that she has. Respondents F1 and F2 further talked about positive feedback, where F1 referred to so-called "positive feedback bank", and F2 referred to forwards instead of negative feedback.

"My look on feedback is that the more you invest in positive feedback, the easier it gets when you want to have some kind of constructive feedback. [...] When you have invested, I call it a little bit the feedback bank, so if I have invested a lot of positive feedback, then it's easy to withdraw. When I come to say, okay, this was not really good [...] it's easier if I have that

trust or that bank of feedback is full of 'I know that she thinks I'm good, I know that she gave
me feedback yesterday about that thing and bla bla bla'. Then it's easier to listen and not
reject the constructive feedback" - F1

"I always make sure that they can hear when they have done something good. As well as if
they don't perform the thing that they should, I don't give them feedback, I give them
feedforward, because I think feedback is more negative. It's something that has been
happening a long time ago, there needs to be feedforward. So they know what to do next time
so they can move on and be better" - F2

5. Analysis

In this chapter, the empirical findings will be analyzed from a theoretical perspective. To
analyze the research topic in a structured way, this chapter is divided into three sections,
following the structure of the proposed framework. These are: individual behavior, leadership
style and organizational culture.

5.1 Individual behavior

The empirical findings within individual behavior were divided into three sections. In the first
section, the respondents were asked to describe themselves with five character traits. The
second section regards their usual team role, whilst the last section regards their working
preferences. Answers of the respondents together with what literature suggests as
stereotypical "masculine" and "feminine" traits are summarized below in Table 3.

Individual behavior	Actions	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
"Masculine" — Individual traits	Delegating	X				X					
	Straightforward	X				X	X				
	Goal-oriented		X	X		X		X		X	
"Feminine" — Individual traits	Good listener								X		X
	Kind/caring						X	X			
	People-oriented			X					X		
"Masculine" — Team role	Leadership role	X		X	X	X				X	X
"Masculine" — Work preferences	Working alone			X		X			X		
"Feminine" — Work preferences	Collaborating	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X

Table 3*. Summary of individual behavior analysis*

The empirical findings indicate that there was a higher tendency for the male respondents to describe themselves as goal-oriented and have a more straightforward approach than for the female respondents. It was also more common for the male respondents to take on leadership roles when working in groups, where male respondents M1 and M5 additionally explained one of their character traits to be delegating. This is supported by the literature, as Eagly and Steffen (1984) and Eagly and Wood (1991) states that men usually are leaning towards being task-oriented, direct and inclined to emerge as leaders. In the section concerning whether the respondents prefer working individually or in collaboration with others in accomplishing tasks, M3 and M5 explained that they prefer working on their own, which is supported by Holmes and Stubbe (2003) who refers to men as being more autonomous than women. However, the majority of men still preferred collaborating with others, which is rather considered a "feminine" trait (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). Bem (1974) implies that many people do not fit into these traditional gender differences. That is, that men also can behave in stereotypically "feminine" manner. This means that, even though the majority of men described themselves as delegating, straightforward and goal-oriented and prefers taking on a leadership role when working in groups, the majority's preference for collaboration may indicate that they are not exclusively stereotypically "masculine". As the four types of gender role self-concepts, visualized in Figure 3 in chapter 2.1, indicates that individuals can behave feminine (high on feminine traits, low on masculine traits), masculine (high on masculine

traits, low on feminine traits), androgynous (high on both feminine and masculine traits), or undifferentiated (low on both feminine and masculine traits) (Bem, 1974), these findings may indicate that most of the male respondents are having both "masculine" and "feminine" traits. Moreover, the only male leader who responded in full accordance with the "masculine" attributes, was M5, which according to the model of gender role self-concepts possibly can be referred to as being masculine, i.e. high on "masculine" traits and low on "feminine" traits.

When it comes to the female respondents, female leader F1 described herself as straightforward, and F2 and F4 described themselves as goal-oriented, which is more in line with "masculine" attributes, in being direct and task-oriented (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). However, the majority of the female leaders describe themselves as good listeners, kind/caring, and people-oriented. This relates much to what literature refers to female tendencies, in being friendly and emphatic (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 1991) and the "feminine" trait of being person-oriented (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). When it came to team roles, female respondents F4 and F5 were the only ones mentioning taking on a leadership role. Respondents F2 and F3 preferred having a more listening approach, where they preferred taking in the team's perspectives on the matter and collaborating together to accomplish the task. This is in line with the collaborative nature of "feminine" behaviors (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). Lastly, regarding the section of working preferences, all the female respondents preferred collaboration, which is a stereotypical "feminine" trait (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). These female individual behaviors can also be analyzed in terms of the model of gender role self-concepts, visualized in Figure 3 in chapter 2.1. Many female respondents showed more of an equal division between "masculine" and "feminine" behaviors, than the male respondents, with a higher tendency for "feminine" behavior. Moreover, none of the female respondents were showing exclusively "masculinity" or "femininity".

As Eagly (1997) states that the societal beliefs of gender roles not only has continued to impact the expectations of gender roles, but also led to women and men actually adopting these behaviors into their lives, it explains why there's a certain tendency for the male respondents to describe themselves in more "masculine" ways, and for the female respondents to describe themselves in slightly more "feminine" ways. However, in line with the ideas of Bem (1974), the majority of the respondents does not exclusively fit into these traditional gender differences. Rather, the majority seems to be a combination of both

"masculine" and "feminine" behaviors, to different degrees. These different degrees signifies that there seems to be a higher tendency for the female respondents to behave androgynous, i.e high on both "masculine" and "feminine" traits, than for the male respondents in this particular research.

5.2 Leadership style

The empirical findings within leadership style were divided into three sections. The first section regarded communication style. This was followed by delegation and control, and support. As the literature review concluded that transformational leadership is best suited for the hybrid work environment, the findings within the three sections are divided into different actions and connected to the four dimensions of transformational leadership, summarized in Table 4 below. Further clarification: the crosses within brackets indicate an indirect approach.

Leadership style	Actions	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Idealized influence	Clear demands	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	
	Being a role model			X	X	X	X		X	X	
	Trust				X		X		X		
Inspirational motivation	Explaining decisions						X	X	X	X	X
	Working with team			X			X	X	X		X
Intellectual stimulation	Adapting style		X		X				X	X	
	Involving in decisions	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Personal growth		X	X	(X)		X		(X)		
	Self-leadership	X			(X)		X		(X)		
Individualized consideration	Listening			X			X	X	X	X	X
	Coaching	X	X							X	X
	Promoting collaboration	X	X				X		X	X	X

Table 4. *Summary of leadership style analysis.*

When it comes to the leader's communication skills, the majority of respondents expressed that they communicate clear demands and expectations in order to help the employees move forward. By communicating clear demands and expectations, the leaders can help their

employees in understanding what is expected of them and what goals they need to achieve. In that sense, M3 also states that it is important for the employees to see the actual value generated. The dimension of idealized influence is an important part of transformational leadership, which gives the team a sense of purpose, and a positive vision of where the organization is going (Daft, 2008). However, it was only the female respondents that expressively value the trait of being humble and being able to understand people when moving forward. This is also closely related to the part where mainly the female leaders stress the importance of listening. They highlighted the importance of being patient and actively listening to the team's thoughts and concerns about different subjects, which is closely related to the individualized consideration dimension of transformational leadership (Bass, 1997; Avolio et al., 1999). This is, according to Wiatr and Showron-Mielnik (2023) especially important during hybrid work, as leaders must be emphatic towards how the employees are feeling and practice good listening skills. The fact that the female leaders have a stronger tendency of emphasizing listening, and stressing the importance of understanding people when moving forward, than the male leaders, is further supported by Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001). The authors implies that the inherent qualities of females are closely linked to the individual consideration where the leader pays attention to the employees needs. In addition to this, it is also the leader's ability to act as a coach that exemplifies the dimension of individualized consideration (Bass 1985) which respondents M1, M2, F4 and F5 all describe in doing.

Related to communication skills Yammarino and Bass (1990) further states that it is important to analyze the leader-follower interaction. The respondents M2, M4, F3 and F4 highlight the importance of being able to change and adapt the communication style towards the different team members. Both when it comes to differences in how individuals receive information, but also in how to communicate instructions and guidance towards different personalities. This type of leader-follower interaction therefore describes the communication to be based on individual differences, which is further associated with the communication style of the transformational leader (Yammarino & Bass, 1990).

When it came to delegation, the majority of respondents described how some sort of delegation is a natural part of their leadership role. The trait of being delegating therefore seems to be equally evident amongst the male and female respondents. This is however not supported by the literature, which refers to the assertive and directive part of transformational

leadership as being "masculine" (Vinkenburg et al., 2011). However, it was more evident amongst the male respondents to directly use the word *delegation* when talking about their leadership style, whereas the female leaders tended to refer to it indirectly, by using words such as "setting clear framework" and "provide clarity in what needs to be done". This indirect approach towards delegation can perhaps be explained by the stereotypical "feminine" description by Holmes and Stubbe (2003) who refers to the "feminine" behavior of being indirect, compared to the direct "masculine" approach.

Daft (2008) further explains that the transformational leadership differs from the transactional leadership style in that the former gives employees greater freedom. Through defined boundaries set by the leader, the employees can operate in relative freedom to accomplish the goals. Moreover, as hybrid work balances between both collaboration and autonomy, behaviors such as the stimulation of employees' independence of the transformational leader is according to the literature essential when work is turning to a hybrid setting (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Related to this, all of the respondents describe the decision making within their team to be a combination of both set goals and involvement of the employees. That is, there are set overarching goals, or framework, but it's the team together who decides on how to reach them. This is much connected to the dimension of intellectual stimulation, where transformational leaders enable their teams to be involved in the decision-making and work with relative autonomy to achieve the goals (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023) .

All the female respondents additionally talked about the importance of clearly explaining why certain decisions are being made and how the team benefits from them. It was also more common for the female leaders to put an emphasis on working together with the team in reaching the organizational goals. There's more of a collaborative reasoning within the team, where these leaders value their employees' opinions and perspectives. During hybrid work, this is also emphasized as a crucial aspect (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik (2023). Bass (1997) and Avolio et al. (1999) implies that the transformational leader has the ability to provide meaning for the task at hand, which inspires the team to move forward. By clearly explaining why decisions are being made and how the team benefits from it, at the same time as working together with the team, these actions may be connected to the dimension of inspirational motivation explained by the above authors.

When it comes to monitoring the work, Streimikiene et al. (2021) state that the transformational leader leads with trust. The empirical findings in this area show a somewhat dispersed view. Those respondents that mentioned that they trust their employees to get the work done, even when working remotely, were respondents M1, M3, M4, F1, F3 and F4. However, in these interviews, some of these respondents also appeared to be using monitoring tools, even though they described trust in their employees. Those that were mentioning complete trust, without the usage of any monitoring tools, were respondents F1, F3 and M4. According to literature, leaders who exhibit idealized influence are seen as role models (Avolio et al., 1999). They are therefore expressing the values and behaviors they expect from others in return. By trusting the employees, these respondents expect respect and delivery back.

As much of the empirical findings found differences between female and male leaders, it also reveals some degree of similarities. These similarities regard the promotion of personal growth and self-leadership, which is linked to the behavioral dimension of intellectual stimulation of transformational leadership (Bass, 1997; Avolio et al., 1999). Personal growth was only mentioned by three leaders, and self-leadership was only mentioned by two. Additionally, according to M2, the current and unstable situation has resulted in personal growth taking a back seat, as the emphasis now lies more on prioritizing the team over oneself. This indicates that, regardless of gender, the respondents seem to not place significant emphasis on either personal growth or self-leadership to a larger extent. At least not directly. However, by trusting the employees (Streimikiene et al., 2021), and by giving the employees greater freedom within a set framework, it strengthens the possibility for the employees to grow and develop self-leadership (Daft, 2008). This might indicate that there's an indirect approach towards personal growth and self-leadership, even though it is not mentioned directly by more respondents. Therefore, the mentioned complete trust in employees by F1, F3 and M4 could potentially be seen to facilitate employee growth and the development of self-leadership.

Lastly, the questions regarding strategies and approaches in developing a supportive culture also revealed some tendencies towards a transformational approach amongst several respondents. When it came to collaboration, it was mainly the female respondents who described using different strategies for promoting collaboration. Communication seems to be a key driver amongst the most respondents that indeed mentioned strategies and approaches

in facilitating and promoting collaboration within their teams. Huang et al. (2010) states that the transformational leader supplements the transactional leadership by focusing on relationship-building and hence making teamwork salient. This is further described as being crucial when working hybrid (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Again, the empirical findings showed women to focus the most on promoting collaboration, which is supported by the ideas of Taleb (2010) and Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001). Further related to the strategies and approaches in developing a supportive organizational culture, F1, F3, F4 M3, M4 and M5 describe how they emphasize being a role model. Respondents M4 and F4 do not relate this to only promoting well-being and work-life balance, but rather emphasizes being a role model in all aspects. The emphasis on being a role model, and in exhibiting admirable behavior, is according to Avolio et al. (1999) furthermore related to the idealized influence dimension of transformational leadership.

Summary wise, many respondents exhibited tendencies for transformational leadership. Looking at Table 4, the female respondents demonstrated a more balanced approach across all dimensions of transformational leadership, than the male respondents. The male respondents were showing a slightly stronger tendency towards the dimension of intellectual stimulation, even though this was rather equal between the male and female leaders, while the female respondents instead were showing stronger tendencies towards the dimensions of inspirational motivation and individual consideration. These findings are in line with what Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) state in that the individual consideration is closely linked to the stereotypical feminine personality. However, Vinkenburg et al. (2011) also state that the inspirational motivation component of transformational leadership is seen to be more important for men than women when it comes to promotion to leadership positions. In this study, however, the female respondents were showing stronger emphasis on the dimension of inspirational motivation. This could perhaps partly be explained by the fact that many of the female respondents were demonstrating androgynous behaviors, which means that they also demonstrated "masculine" behaviors in their personalities.

However, on a further note, as research made by Cook (1985) states that individuals may exhibit different degrees of "feminine" and "masculine" behaviors depending on situation and context, the findings of female leaders having a stronger tendency towards transformational leadership might also be explained by the hybrid work context. Bem (1974) states that individuals leaning towards being androgynous possess a broad set of behavioral

options that makes them able to behave in a flexible and adaptable way within different contexts and situational demands. As the female leaders of this research demonstrated stronger tendencies towards androgynous behavior, it might explain the tendency for these leaders to be more flexible in their approach. Leading a scattered workforce might therefore evoke more "feminine" traits amongst the female leaders in order to fit into the situational demands of today.

5.3 Strategies for developing a supportive culture

The empirical findings within the strategies for developing a supportive culture were divided into three sections. The first section regards collaboration and teamwork, followed by wellbeing and work-life balance, and openness and trust. These sections are connected to the literature review, summarized in Table 5 below. Further clarification: the crosses within brackets indicate an indirect approach.

Supportive culture	Actions	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Collaboration and teamwork	Approaches for collaboration	X	X				X		X	X	X
Well-being and work-life balance	Working hours			X			X	X	X	X	X
	Work control	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Personal growth		X	X	(X)		X		(X)		
Openness and trust	Participation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Transparent communication	X			X		X	X			
	Periodic evaluation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 5. Summary of strategies for developing a supportive culture analysis

The hybrid work setting may bring challenges such as employees feeling isolated and disconnected from their colleagues (Benedic, 2023). The new trend of hybrid work is therefore requiring a culture that fosters team building and connections among the employees (Hirsch, 2021; Van Pottelsberghe, 2022; Summerfield, 2022; Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik,

2023). Three out of five male respondents expressed an already collaborative culture, where no further strategies or approaches were considered needed. This could be interpreted as a positive sign that the organization and team may already have a strong collaborative culture, and that the leaders in question may not need to implement anything further. However, it is also important to note that even if the collaboration is an integrated part of the culture, there may still be areas for improvement. Hirsch (2021) explains that the lack of consistent and uninterrupted connections of hybrid work leads to weaker natural connections and hence makes it more difficult for relationships to maintain. Teamwork might therefore be considered an iterative process that needs to be nurtured and maintained, especially in the hybrid work setting.

Furthermore, Schein (2004) implies that effective leaders have the ability to shape the culture through the things that they pay attention to and celebrate. On that note, F3 explains that she together with the team tries to come up with how to work better together. By discussing their strengths and weaknesses and how they together can try to work with those in order to find a good way forward, she pays a strong emphasis on the importance of collaboration. The fact that the female respondents showed stronger emphasis on strategies and approaches in fostering a collaborative environment is supported by (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003) who refers to being collaborative as a stereotypical "feminine" trait. This could be explained by the fact that the majority of female respondents in this research were showing tendencies for androgynous behavior, but leaning towards being more "feminine".

The hybrid work setting also requires leaders to more than ever be emphatic towards how employees are feeling and pay close attention to their well-being (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). When asking respondents about their strategies and approaches in ensuring employees well-being and work-life balance, many express that it is difficult to pick up on which employees are working too much. This is aligned with the views of Sparks et al. (2001), which suggest that regulating work hours can be a useful strategy for leaders to foster well-being among their teams. The empirical findings revealed that female respondents seemed to be more concerned about extensive work hours than the male respondents, and expressed stronger emphasis on confronting those employees who they find working too much. Once again, this can be connected to the thoughts of Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) who connect this stereotypical "feminine" trait to the transformational leadership dimension of individual consideration. As "feminine" traits are being described as being

more person-oriented, this could further explain the female leader's stronger concern for the team's well-being (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003).

Further recommendation for facilitating well-being within teams is according to Sparks et al. (2021) and Ryff (1989) work control, or environmental mastery. In line with this, all respondents offer remote work options, and agree on the fact that having flexible work hours is beneficial for maintaining a healthy work-life balance and well-being among the employees. Ryff (1989) additionally mentions personal growth as an important generator for employees well-being. This is mentioned by respondents F1, M2 and M3 who talk about personal growth in the sense of encouraging their employees to try new things, think in new ways and challenge themselves. However, as noted earlier, leaders may foster personal growth and self-leadership indirectly by showing trust towards their team. In that case, there's an indirect approach by M4 and F3. Nevertheless, there seems to be a slightly stronger emphasis by the male respondents in this area. This can furthermore be connected to the dimension of intellectual stimulation of transformational leadership, which the male respondents of this research showed slightly stronger tendencies for.

A supportive organizational culture is also characterized as being open and with a lot of trust (Wallch, 1983). All respondents express that they include the employees in the decision-making, where there are set overarching goals, or framework, but it's the team together who decides on how to reach them , which according to Bernstein (1988) are good strategies for fostering trust. Bernstein (1988) further states two-way information sharing as important, where the leader supplies their teams with all the information they need to get the job done well. In accordance with this, an equal division of male and female leaders expressed the importance of transparency towards their teams. Lastly, Bernstein (1988) also emphasizes the importance of evaluation, where there should be periodic review of results and accomplishments. All respondents express using feedback of some sort. However, the male respondents described formal feedback meetings, while the female respondents also emphasized the importance of informal and frequent feedback sessions. Despite this, it appears that all respondents align with the recommendation made by Bernstein (1988) regarding periodic review of results of results and accomplishments.

In summary, these findings reveal that the female respondents are putting a stronger emphasis on developing a collaborative environment and are more invested in ensuring well-being in

terms of extensive work hours and the male respondents put slightly stronger emphasis on personal growth. As a supportive culture is characterized as possessing qualities such as trust, safety, encouragement, relationship-orientation and collaboration (Wallach, 1983), it includes many stereotypical "feminine" behaviors, such as facilitative, collaborative, supportive feedback and person-orientation (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003) which might explain the female leaders stronger emphasis on developing a supportive culture. However, this could once again be discussed through the lens of the androgyny criticisms presented by Cook (1985). The fact that the female respondents showed stronger emphasis on approaches and strategies in developing a supportive culture might also be explained by the specific hybrid work context. This means that the hybrid work environment might evoke female leaders to exhibit stronger emphasis on "feminine" traits in regards to these circumstances.

5.4 Adjusted framework

The findings of this study reaffirms the preference for androgynous behavior in order to exhibit transformational leadership and in developing a supportive culture, as stated in the proposed framework in Section 2.4. This highlights the continuing relevance of balancing between both masculine and feminine traits. However, this research additionally sheds light on the relevance of feminine traits. Although it is already highlighted in the literature that androgyny with strong feminine traits is preferable for transformational leadership (Hackman et al., 1992), these findings reveal that androgynous behavior with an extra emphasis on feminine traits have an influence on approaches and strategies adopted by the leaders in developing a supportive culture. The proposed framework is therefore adjusted, as seen in Figure 7 below.
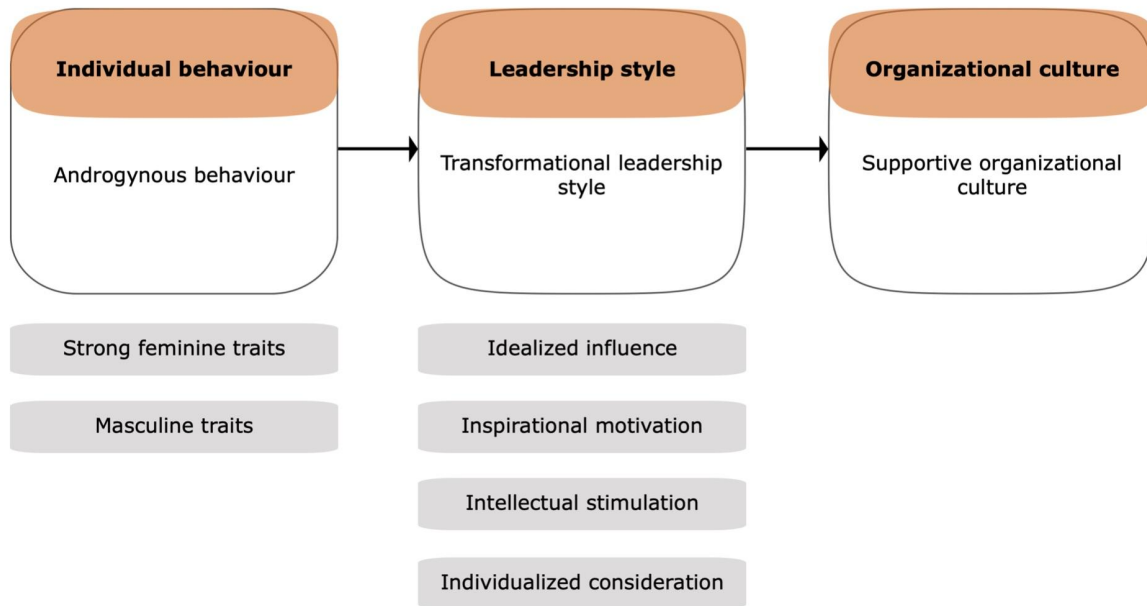
Figure 7. Adjusted framework

6. Conclusions

In this chapter, the research question will be answered by discussing the components of the proposed framework. In the second part of this chapter, implications from these conclusions as well as suggestions for future research are provided.

6.1 Revisiting the research question

This thesis aims to investigate the relationship between the gender of organizational leaders and their influence on the development of a supportive organizational culture in the context of hybrid work, with a focus on their specific actions and behaviors. For this purpose, the research question was formulated:

- How does the gender of organizational leaders influence the development of a supportive organizational culture in the context of hybrid work?

To address this research question, I have examined how individual behavior influences leadership style and how this, in turn, impacts the leader's approaches and strategies in

developing a supportive organizational culture. Through the empirical findings, several conclusions can be made.

Firstly, it was shown that individual behavior plays an important role in shaping the leadership style. The empirical findings and analysis revealed that the leaders' individual behaviors and traits tend to influence the way they lead their teams. In this research, both the male and female respondents demonstrated "feminine" and "masculine" behaviors. However, the male respondents were demonstrating stronger tendencies towards masculine behavior, while the female leaders demonstrated stronger tendencies for androgynous behavior, with an extra emphasis on "feminine" traits. This seems to influence the leaders leadership style, as the female leaders showed stronger tendencies for transformational leadership. This conclusion reaffirms the findings of Hackman et al. (1992) who found that there is a significant positive relationship between both "feminine" and "masculine" factors and the transformational leadership, but that there is a somewhat stronger positive relationship between "feminine" factors and transformational leadership.

Secondly, based on the empirical findings and analysis, it suggests that the presence of "feminine" traits is, through the demonstration of transformational leadership, also associated with more approaches and strategies towards developing a supportive culture. This indicates that the inherent and stereotypical "feminine" behaviors tend to be especially beneficial when developing a supportive organizational culture. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this does not mean that female leaders are more successful in developing a supportive culture, but rather that "feminine" traits are beneficial, which men can possess as well.

In summary, this research provides an understanding of how men and women construct their gender identities and how they balance these with their leadership roles and use them in their approaches and strategies for developing a supportive culture in the hybrid work context. Understanding how individual behavior influences leadership style, and in turn, shapes the organizational culture, is essential for leaders as well as organizations in order to develop a supportive culture in the hybrid work era. These findings suggest that those leaders who exhibit androgynous behavior, with stronger emphasis on "feminine" traits, tend to be more inclined to develop a supportive culture. This as being person-and relationship-oriented and collaborative is shown to be beneficial when developing a culture that focuses on trust, well-being, relationship-orientation and collaboration.

6.2 Implications from conclusions

6.2.1 Practical implications

The role organizational leaders have in developing a supportive culture have a big impact on the future since the "new normal" work setting has changed. With the hybrid work, leaders must prioritize their focus on understanding and adapting to the changing needs and behaviors of their employees, which is in line with the ideas of (Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023). Therefore, by shedding light on these changing needs and behaviors, this study serves the purpose of increasing awareness, and highlights important aspects that need to be considered by today's leaders. This awareness may also hopefully be helpful in regards to leadership training, in helping today's leaders to develop the necessary skills that can foster a supportive culture.

Lastly, this research hopefully provides insights that can improve organizational performance. The hybrid work setting requires a supportive organizational culture. By promoting such a culture, organizations can hopefully improve employees' attitudes as well as financial and operational performance, as (Hartnell et al., 2011) states about a strong culture.

6.2.2 Theoretical implications

As mentioned in the introduction, gender, leadership style and organizational culture are well discussed topics. However, this study contributes to the existing research as it investigates the intersection of these, in the context of hybrid work. As the new trend of hybrid work has become the prevailing work setting, it is of great value to investigate the impacts it has on the different aspects of organizations. Additionally, as there are many theories regarding the "ideal" work settings, leadership behaviors and organizational cultures, this research might also have a valuable contribution by updating the understanding of what constitutes "ideal" and "best practice" considering these new ways of working.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

As mentioned in section 3.6, one limitation of this research is the lack of observations and interviews with employees. Even though this research examines the factors that influence the approaches and strategies used by male and female leaders in developing a supportive culture, it would be of interest to explore whether these are actually put into practice. Since some leaders may express approaches and strategies that are desired, rather than actually

acted upon, observations and interviews with employees could provide a more nuanced and in-depth view on this phenomenon.

Furthermore, this particular research was delimited by only investigating leaders and organizations located in Sweden, as described in section 1.7. As there might be cultural differences depending on the country, this is also something that could also be considered in future research. Even though the female leaders in this research displayed androgynous behavior with higher tendency for "feminine" traits, and exhibited tendencies for transformational leadership and stronger approaches in developing a supportive culture, it does not necessarily mean that this is true in other cultures. Therefore, it would be insightful to examine whether there are any significant differences in the approaches and strategies used by male and female leaders in different countries and why these differences may exist.

Another suggestion for future research is to involve the loop presented in relation to the proposed framework in section 2.4. This was out of the scope of this research, as that would have required a more in-depth analysis of the respective cultures. However, as the literature suggest there to be an ongoing interplay between leadership style and organizational culture, where the leadership shapes the organizational culture which in turn also is shaped by the developed culture (Schein, 2004), it would be insightful to further investigate whether this also has an impact on the leaders strategies and approaches in developing a supportive culture.

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Appendix 1. Interview guide

General questions

1. What does the team look like today?
2. How does the team normally work? How much is remotely and how much is in-office?

Individual behavior

1. Describe five clear character traits in you that you may get use of in your work?
2. Imagine that you are at a conference and end up in a team with both higher and lower managers and where you have to solve a task. What role do you normally take on?
3. If you need to get something done, do you prefer working on it autonomously or do you prefer collaborating with others to accomplish the task?

Leadership style

1. How would you team members describe you as a leader?
2. Can you tell me about a time when you had to make a difficult decision that affected your team? How did you balance the needs of your team members with the goals of the organization?
3. How do you approach delegation and decision-making within your team?
   - Do you focus more on setting clear goals and deadlines that are easy to follow or do you prefer having open conversations with the team members about it?
4. Have you ever had trouble communicating expectations to an employee because of fear of ruining the relationship?
   - If you take this conversation, how do you present/handle it?

Strategies for developing a supportive organizational culture

1. How do you make sure that everyone does what they are supposed to when working remotely?
2. What steps have you taken to establish trust and openness within your team?
   - Do you work with feedback?
3. How do you encourage collaboration and teamwork among your team members?
4. Can you describe a situation where a team member faced a personal or professional challenge, and how you and the organization supported them through this challenge?

5. How do you lead by example in terms of creating and reinforcing a culture that prioritizes employee well-being and work-life balance?

6. What strategies, other than mentioned, do you use to develop a supportive organizational culture during hybrid work?

7. Do you believe it is more important to have a supportive culture today in the hybrid work setting than maybe before?

Executive summary

1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevailing work arrangement has become a hybrid model in varying forms. This shift has given the employees more control over both the location and timing of their work (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023), leading to several benefits such as increased job satisfaction and work-life balance (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). Hybrid work seems to be here to stay, as employees value the flexibility that it provides. However, although hybrid work offers numerous benefits, it also presents several challenges such as employees feeling isolated and disconnected from their colleagues (Benedic, 2023). With teams being spread out and relying on communication through digital tools and platforms, building strong relationships and fostering a sense of community has become more challenging than ever (Hirsch, 2021). Consequently, the shift towards hybrid work requires a reevaluation of the organizational culture in order to adapt to the new circumstances of today. That is, organizational leaders must recognize the need to rebuild the culture in the context of a scattered workforce (Spicer, 2020). To address this, organizations must prioritize the development of a culture that emphasizes relationship-building, open communication, collaboration and trust (Van Pottelsberghe, 2022; Summerfield, 2022; Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023), which is much connected to a so-called supportive organizational culture (Wallach, 1983). As leaders play a critical role in shaping the culture, it requires them to understand the changing needs and behaviors of their employees in the hybrid work context (Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023).

However, the impact of gender on leadership style and organizational culture is an area that has received relatively little attention among scholars. Research has shown that men and women often lead differently (Taleb, 2010), and these differences can have an implication for how they shape the organizational culture (Sendra, 2022). Social role theory suggests that women are formed by specific expectations from society already from birth, making them develop characteristics that are more nurturing in nature. Women furthermore tend to be more emphatic and people-oriented in their behavior, while men, on the other hand, tend to be more agentic and task-oriented (Eagly, 1997). It is, however, unclear how these expectations and social roles of females and males influence their organizational cultural competencies.

In conclusion, there is a research gap in the existing literature regarding the role of gender in developing a supportive culture during hybrid work. Understanding the influence of gender on leadership styles and organizational culture is highly relevant for organizations that are seeking to effectively navigate in the hybrid work context. This research aims to fill that gap by shedding light on the relationship between gender, leadership, organizational culture in the hybrid work era.

1.2 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between the gender of organizational leaders and their influence on the development of a supportive organizational culture in the context of hybrid work, with a specific focus on their actions and behaviors. The aim is therefore to explore how the gender of organizational leaders influences their approaches in developing culture, and whether there are any differences in the strategies used by male and female leaders. With this as a background, the research question is as follows:

- How does the gender of organizational leaders influence the development of a supportive organizational culture in the context of hybrid work?

2. Literature review

2.1 Gender

The chapter about gender starts with explaining stereotypical feminine and masculine traits. Stereotypical feminine traits are: indirect, facilitative, collaborative person-oriented and supportive feedback, while stereotypical masculine traits are: direct, competitive, autonomous and task-oriented (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). However, Bem (1974) states that many people do not fit into these traditional gender differences. That is, women can behave in a stereotypically "masculine" manner and men can behave in a stereotypically "feminine" manner. The main theory in this chapter is therefore the gender role self-concept model, consisting of four concepts: feminine (high on feminine traits, low on masculine traits), masculine (high on masculine traits, low on feminine traits), androgynous (high on both feminine and masculine traits), and undifferentiated (low on both feminine and masculine traits) (Bem, 1974). These four concepts serve as a crucial foundation of this thesis as they, in

turn, have the potential to influence how leadership is conducted, and may also impact what kind of organizational culture that these leaders tend to create and develop (Sendra, 2022).

However, this chapter further includes criticism towards the concept of androgyny. One criticism is towards the fact that this view is too narrow. Instead it is believed that individuals construct multiple selves, shown in different situations. This means that, depending on the situation or context, individuals may exhibit different degrees of "feminine" and "masculine" behaviors (Cook, 1985).

2.3 Leadership style

The theory referred to in this chapter is the full-range leadership theory, which includes three overarching leadership styles; the transformational, transactional and laissez faire (Avolio, 2010). The very focus is on the transformational leadership, which is considered to be the most effective style of the three (Lowe, 1996). These leaders differ from others in the sense of having high motivation and strong emotional connections. There's more of a focus on the people, with a lot of trust in them (Streimikiene et al., 2021). These types of leaders furthermore use four behavioral dimensions to encourage and inspire their teams into their greatest potential: *Idealized influence* (or *charisma), Inspirational motivation*, *Intellectual stimulation* and *Individualized consideration* (Bass, 1997; Avolio et al., 1999). However, the transition towards hybrid work has changed how leadership is exercised, as leaders now must effectively communicate with both in-person and remote team members (Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023). Related to this, it is noted that much literature within this area provides strong support for transformational leadership as being the most effective style when it comes to leading hybrid teams (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012; Wiatr & Showron-Mielnik, 2023; Pauleen, 2003).

When it comes to the relationship between gender and transformational or transactional leadership styles, some studies imply that the inherent qualities of females are closely linked to the transformational leadership (Taleb, 2010; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). However, as in the chapter of gender, women sometimes behave in stereotypical "masculine" ways, and men in "feminine" ways. Therefore, Kark et al. (2012) suggest that the crucial factor in establishing a leader's transformational leadership style is the perception of the leader's gender-role characteristic as "feminine", "masculine", androgynous" or

"undifferentiated", rather than the leader's biological sex. Transformational leadership requires a gender balance that consists of strong and positive "feminine" as well as "masculine" characteristics (Kark et al., 2012). This relates to the androgynous behavior, that is high on both "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics.
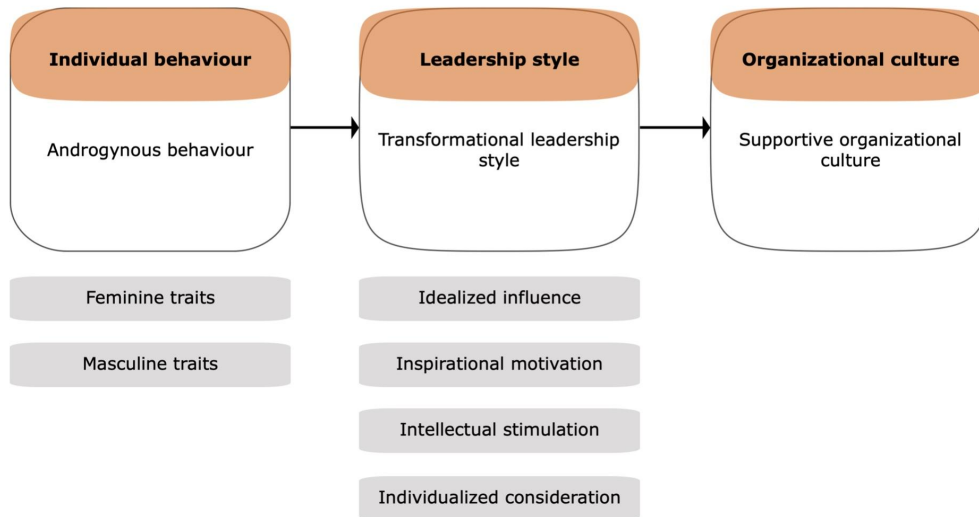
2.4 Organizational culture

The literature presents different types of culture classifications. The distinction used in this research is the one made by Wallach (1983), who separates between three different types of organizational cultures; the bureaucratic, innovative and supportive. As much literature suggests that relationship-building, regular and strong communication and in fostering team building and connections among the employees are being crucial when working in hybrid environments (Hirsch, 2021; Van Pottelsberghe, 2022; Summerfield, 2022; Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023), strong connections are being made to the supportive organizational culture described by Wallach (1983) as being warm, open and friendly. An organization whose organizational culture is highly supportive is furthermore possessing qualities such as trust, safety, encouragement, relationship-orientation and collaboration (Wallach, 1983).

Furthermore, related to leadership style, previous research within this field concludes that the transformational leadership style is found to create team-oriented, collaborative, and people-oriented cultures (Kawatra & Krishnan, 2004). As the hybrid work environment highlights the need for a supportive culture, characterized in a similar manner, this strengthens the need for transformational leadership even further.

2.4 Proposed framework

The conclusions of the literature review are in the proposed framework connected, where the individual behavior of the leader influences his or her ability of leadership style, that in turn affects the organizational culture. In hybrid settings, it seems preferable to behave androgynous and practice transformational leadership in order to create a supportive organizational culture. Therefore the proposed framework is:

Figure 1. Proposed framework

3. Methodology

As the data collected aimed at describing *how* the gender of organizational leaders impact the development of a supportive organizational culture, rather than measuring it, a qualitative focus of data collection was determined to be best suited. Furthermore, since the hybrid work settings still is considered a rather new trend with few best practices, it was more valuable to allow the participants to respond using their own words, rather than allowing them to choose from a number of fixed answers as in the case of quantitative methods.

This qualitative research strategy opened up for the inductive approach (Bell et al., 2019). However, established theories within gender, leadership and organizational culture already exist. Therefore, as the aim of this research was not to develop a new theory, the inductive approach was not found appropriate. However, given the exploratory stance of this research and that this research aims to explore a broad and rather complex phenomenon, a complete deductive approach was not considered to be appropriate either. Hence, the approach used in this research is the abductive approach. By moving back and forth between reality and what exists regarding literature within the separate areas, this more adaptable approach allowed theory to develop during the research process which ultimately led to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Bell et al., 2019).

Regarding the research design, a comparative design was found to be most appropriate. By comparing several different organizations and female and male leadership styles, the aim was

to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic being studied. This research design also helped to identify patterns that may not have been apparent if studying only one organization alone.

For the primary data collection, interviews were conducted. Because of the comparative research design chosen for this study, semi-structured interviews were chosen as some structure was needed to ensure cross-case compatibility. To collect respondents, a purposive sampling was made, where the respondents were chosen based on their relevance for the study. There was also a snowball sampling, where the first contact was asked to refer me to someone else of his/hers choice that also met the inclusion criterias of this research. The aim was furthermore to study an even number of leaders, in order to get an even distribution of female and male leaders. This resulted in a total of 10 interviews, equally divided between the two genders. Two types of criterions for the sampling were constructed. First, the leader and their team had to work in accordance with a hybrid work model. Second, the leader must work with professional teams. My personal definition of this is teams who are doing more advanced work and that may require a higher degree of education. This criterion was chosen on the basis that the leadership role may differ considerably in regards to what type of teams they are leading.

The interviews were furthermore conducted through video meetings. These interviews were guided by an interview guide, consisting of broader themes around which the interview was centered. The structure of the interview guide was therefore following the proposed framework of this research, consisting of the main areas: gender, leadership style and organizational culture in the hybrid context.

Finally, the chosen data analysis method was the thematic analysis. As the thematic analysis proves beneficial when summarizing main characteristics of large data sets, it was shown to be the most appropriate method for this study. Furthermore, since the focus of this research was to investigate similarities and differences between male and female leadership styles, the thematic analysis further allowed me to capture these. This thematic analysis resulted in three overarching themes together with in total 39 codes.

4. Empirical findings and analysis

4.1 Individual behavior

At first, the respondents were asked to describe themselves with five character traits. The second area of investigation regards their usual team role, whilst the last section regards their working preferences. The answers of the respondents were in the analysis analyzed together with what literature suggests as stereotypical "masculine" and "feminine" traits, summarized in the table below.

	Individual behavior	Actions	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
"Masculine"	Individual traits	Delegating	X				X					
		Straightforward	X				X	X				
		Goal-oriented		X	X		X		X		X	
"Feminine"		Good listener								X		X
		Kind/caring						X	X			
		People-oriented			X					X		
"Masculine"	Team role	Leadership role	X		X	X	X				X	X
"Masculine"	Work preferences	Working alone			X		X			X		
"Feminine"		Collaborating	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X

Table 1. Summary of individual behavior analysis

The empirical findings found men having a tendency to describe themselves in terms of delegating, straightforward and goal-oriented, and showed strong preference for taking on leadership roles when working together with others. This is shown to be supported by the literature, as Eagly and Steffen (1984) and Eagly and Wood (1991) states that men usually are leaning towards being task-oriented, direct and inclined to emerge as leaders. The female respondents, on the other hand, also had some tendency to describe themselves straightforward and goal-oriented, but demonstrated stronger tendencies for traits such as good listeners, kind/caring and people-oriented. This relates much to what literature refers to female tendencies, in being friendly and emphatic (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Wood,

1991). There were furthermore some preference towards taking on leadership roles amongst the female leaders, but not as strongly as amongst the men. Lastly, the majority of respondents showed a preference for collaboration, which the literature considers a rather "feminine" trait (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). However, the female leaders showed somewhat stronger preference for it than the male ones.

Summary wise, many female respondents showed more of an equal division between "masculine" and "feminine" behaviors, than the male respondents, with a somewhat higher tendency for "feminine" behavior. In line with the ideas of Bem (1974), the majority of the respondents does not exclusively fit into these traditional gender differences. Rather, the majority seems to be a combination of both "masculine" and "feminine" behaviors, to different degrees. These different degrees signifies that there seems to be a slightly stronger tendency for the female respondents to behave androgynous, i.e high on both "masculine" and "feminine" traits, than for the male respondents in this particular research.

4.2 Leadership style

The empirical findings within leadership style were divided into three sections: communication style, delegation and control, and support. As the literature review concluded that transformational leadership is best suited for the hybrid work environment, the findings within the three sections are divided into different actions and connected to the four dimensions of transformational leadership, summarized in the table below. Further clarification: the crosses within brackets indicate an indirect approach.

Leadership style	Actions	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Idealized influence	Clear demands	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	
	Being a role model			X	X	X	X		X	X	
	Trust				X		X		X		
Inspirational motivation	Explaining decisions						X	X	X	X	X
	Working with team			X			X	X	X		X
Intellectual stimulation	Adapting style		X		X				X	X	
	Involving in decisions	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Personal growth		X	X	(X)		X		(X)		
	Self-leadership	X			(X)		X		(X)		
Individualized consideration	Listening			X			X	X	X	X	X
	Coaching	X	X							X	X
	Promoting collaboration	X	X				X		X	X	X

Table 2. Summary of leadership style analysis

Summary wise, many respondents exhibited tendencies for transformational leadership. Looking at Table 4, the female respondents demonstrated a more balanced approach across all dimensions of transformational leadership, than the male respondents. The male respondents were showing a slightly stronger tendency towards the dimension of intellectual stimulation, even though this was rather equal between the male and female leaders, while the female respondents instead were showing stronger tendencies towards the dimensions of inspirational motivation and individual consideration. These findings are in line with what Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) state in that the individual consideration is closely linked to the stereotypical feminine personality. However, Vinkenburg et al. (2011) also state that the inspirational motivation component of transformational leadership is seen to be more important for men than women when it comes to promotion to leadership positions. In this study, however, the female respondents were showing stronger emphasis on the dimension of inspirational motivation. This could perhaps partly be explained by the fact that many of the female respondents were demonstrating androgynous behaviors, which means that they also demonstrated "masculine" behaviors in their personalities.

However, on a further note, as research made by Cook (1985) states that individuals may exhibit different degrees of "feminine" and "masculine" behaviors depending on situation and context, the findings of female leaders having a stronger tendency towards transformational leadership might also be explained by the hybrid work context. Bem (1974) states that individuals leaning towards being androgynous possess a broad set of behavioral options that makes them able to behave in a flexible and adaptable way within different contexts and situational demands. As the female leaders of this research demonstrated stronger tendencies towards androgynous behavior, it might explain the tendency for these leaders to be more flexible in their approach. Leading a scattered workforce might therefore evoke more "feminine" traits amongst the female leaders in order to fit into the situational demands of today.

4.3 Organizational culture

The empirical findings within the strategies for developing a supportive culture were divided into three sections. The first section regards collaboration and teamwork, followed by wellbeing and work-life balance, and openness and trust. These sections are connected to the literature review, summarized in Table 3 below. Further clarification: the crosses within brackets indicate an indirect approach.

Supportive culture	Actions	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Collaboration and teamwork	Approaches for collaboration	X	X				X		X	X	X
Well-being and work-life balance	Working hours			X			X	X	X	X	X
	Work control	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Personal growth		X	X	(X)		X		(X)		
Openness and trust	Participation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Transparent communication	X			X		X	X			
	Periodic evaluation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 3. Summary of strategies for developing a supportive culture analysis

When it came to developing a supportive culture, both the male and female respondents were having approaches and strategies within this area. However, the female respondents were putting a stronger emphasis on developing a collaborative environment and were more invested in ensuring well-being in terms of extensive work hours. The male respondents, on the other hand, put slightly stronger emphasis on personal growth. As a supportive culture is characterized as possessing qualities such as trust, safety, encouragement, relationship-orientation and collaboration (Wallach, 1983), it includes many stereotypical "feminine" behaviors, such as facilitative, collaborative, supportive feedback and person-orientation (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003) which might be an explanation for why the female leaders of this study showed stronger emphasis on developing an overall supportive organizational culture than the male leaders. This as the female respondents showed androgynous behavior with stronger emphasis on "feminine" traits.

4.4 Adjusted framework

The findings of this study reaffirms the preference for androgynous behavior in order to exhibit transformational leadership and in developing a supportive culture, as stated in the proposed framework. However, this research additionally sheds light on the relevance of feminine traits. That is, these findings reveal that androgynous behavior with an extra emphasis on "feminine" traits have an influence on approaches and strategies adopted by the leaders in developing a supportive culture. The proposed framework is therefore adjusted, as seen in the figure below.
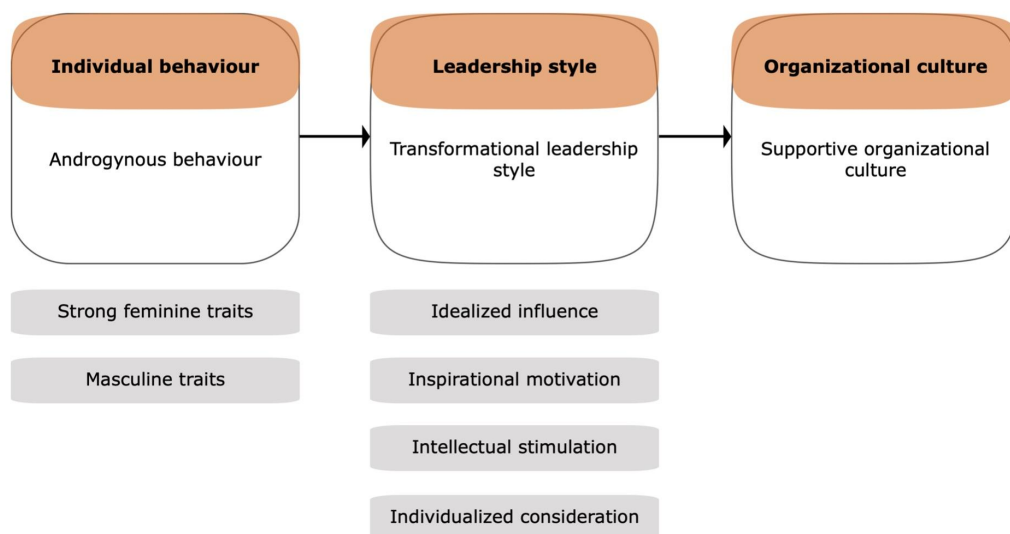
Figure 2. Adjusted framework

5. Conclusion

This thesis aims to investigate the relationship between the gender of organizational leaders and their influence on the development of a supportive organizational culture in the context of hybrid work, with a focus on their specific actions and behaviors. For this purpose, the research question was formulated:

- How does the gender of organizational leaders influence the development of a supportive organizational culture in the context of hybrid work?

To address this research question, I have examined how individual behavior influences leadership style and how this, in turn, impacts the leader's approaches and strategies in developing a supportive organizational culture. Through the empirical findings, several conclusions can be made.

Firstly, it was shown that individual behavior plays an important role in shaping the leadership style. That is, the leaders' individual behaviors and traits tend to influence the way they lead their teams. In this research, both the male and female respondents demonstrated "feminine" and "masculine" behaviors. However, the male respondents were demonstrating stronger tendencies towards masculine behavior, while the female leaders demonstrated stronger tendencies for androgynous behavior, with an extra emphasis on "feminine" traits. This was found to influence the leaders leadership style, as the female leaders showed stronger tendencies for transformational leadership. This conclusion reaffirms the findings of Hackman et al. (1992) who found that there is a significant positive relationship between both "feminine" and "masculine" factors and the transformational leadership, but that there is a somewhat stronger positive relationship between "feminine" factors and transformational leadership.

Secondly, based on the empirical findings and analysis, it suggests that the presence of "feminine" traits is, through the demonstration of transformational leadership, also associated with more approaches and strategies towards developing a supportive culture. This indicates that the inherent and stereotypical "feminine" behaviors tend to be especially beneficial when developing a supportive organizational culture. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this

does not mean that female leaders are more successful in developing a supportive culture, but rather that "feminine" traits are beneficial, which men can possess as well.

To summarize, this research provides an understanding of how men and women construct their gender identities and how they balance these with their leadership roles and use them in their approaches and strategies for developing a supportive culture in the hybrid work context. Understanding how individual behavior influences leadership style, and in turn, shapes the organizational culture, is essential for leaders as well as organizations in order to develop a supportive culture in the hybrid work era. These findings suggest that those leaders who exhibit androgynous behavior, with stronger emphasis on "feminine" traits, tend to be more inclined to develop a supportive culture. This as being person-and relationship-oriented and collaborative is shown to be beneficial when developing a culture that focuses on trust, well-being, relationship-orientation and collaboration.