

**Team Management in Post-COVID Virtual and Hybrid Work Models
in Multinational Corporations: An Institutional and Empirical Examination**

Extended Abstract — Poster Paper Submission

Diego Novellino

Universidad Pontificia Comillas — ICAI-ICADE, DBA Programme

Supervisors: Dr^a M^a Jesús Belizón Cebada & Dr. Pedro César Martínez Morán

1. Problems Addressed, Aims, and Research Questions

The post-COVID shift to virtual and hybrid work has permanently altered how senior directors in multinational corporations (MNCs) coordinate and direct geographically dispersed teams. While organizations have adopted digital tools at scale, the deeper implications for leadership practice, trust formation, and coordination mechanisms remain insufficiently understood. Much of the existing research was developed around bounded project teams, relatively stable forms of virtuality, or contexts with limited cultural complexity, and does not fully capture the managerial realities now faced by senior directors responsible for cross-border collaboration.

This study addresses this gap through a three-layer integrative framework grounded in over 80 foundational papers. The central research question is: *How do senior directors in MNCs coordinate and direct their teams in post-COVID virtual and hybrid work environments?* Three sub-questions structure the inquiry. **SRQ1 (Leadership Enactment):** How do senior directors enact the direction function at a distance—through delegation, feedback, coaching, and leader–member exchanges? **SRQ2 (Coordination Mechanisms):** How do directors design and manage the coordination mechanisms of their distributed teams? **SRQ3 (Contextual Factors):** To what extent do contextual factors—such as trust dynamics, hybrid routines, digitalized competencies, and cultural diversity—influence team management in post-COVID MNC environments?

2. Justification and Importance

This research is important for several reasons. First, senior directors remain underrepresented as empirical subjects in virtual team research, despite being the architects of the communication systems and leadership logics through which distributed work is organized. Second, the post-COVID period marks a meaningful discontinuity: hybrid work introduces new tensions related to visibility, flexibility, relational distance, and the boundaries between formal and informal interaction. Third, the ordering of the research questions reflects a deliberate theoretical choice: the strategic level of control—how one supervises, delegates, and coaches—precedes the operational mechanisms deployed to execute it.

3. Theoretical Basis

The conceptual framework integrates three layers. The first, Leadership Enactment, draws on e-leadership theory (Avolio, Kahai, & Dodge, 2000; Bauwens & Cortellazzo, 2025), leader–member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), and recent reviews of leadership in digitalized contexts (Cortellazzo, Bruni, & Zampieri, 2019; Bell, McAlpine, & Hill, 2023). It addresses how direction is exercised through delegation, supervision, coaching, and relationship management. This layer is positioned first because the strategic direction model shapes the operational coordination mechanisms.

The second layer, Coordination Mechanisms, is grounded in media synchronicity theory (Dennis, Fuller, & Valacich, 2008), adaptive structuration theory (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000), and research on interaction rhythms and knowledge-sharing routines (Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Rosen, 2007). The term mechanisms is preferred over infrastructure because it encompasses technological tools, relational processes, working protocols, and methodological practices.

The third layer, Contextual Navigation, incorporates trust formation in global virtual teams (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Cramton, 2001), hybrid work design (Gratton, 2021), digitalized competencies (Peiró & Martínez-Tur, 2022), and intercultural collaboration dynamics (Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010). A central insight is that relational or “affinity” distance—the weakening of interpersonal connection and trust—may matter more than physical distance alone.

4. Research Design

The study adopts an interpretivist paradigm and a multiple interpretive case study design, where each senior director constitutes a case. The planned sample consists of 12–15 semi-structured interviews with senior directors in MNCs who manage geographically distributed teams in post-COVID hybrid or virtual configurations. Interviews will last 60–90 minutes and are structured around five thematic blocks aligned to the three-layer framework, emphasizing open-ended questions with probing reserved for follow-up. A supplementary component involves brief questionnaires or shorter interviews with 2–3 team members per director, enabling triangulation. Data will be analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, combining deductive coding with inductive openness to emergent themes.

5. Intended Data Sample

The study targets senior directors—typically at VP, CFO, or regional director level—who lead teams of 10 or more members distributed across at least two countries. Purposeful sampling will ensure variation across industries, national contexts, and levels of hybrid intensity. Fieldwork is planned for mid-2026 following ethics approval. The interview protocol has been designed and pilot-tested for coverage across all three framework layers. The supplementary team-member instrument is under development, with the final design to be determined based on feasibility of access through HR structures in each participating MNC.

6. Relevance and Practical Importance

The expected contributions are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the study offers an integrated framework that bridges research streams typically treated in isolation—virtual teams, e-leadership, communication theory, trust, hybrid work, and multicultural collaboration. Methodologically, the multiple-case design with director–team triangulation will provide practice-grounded evidence of how leadership models are enacted rather than merely described. Practically, the findings will help senior directors design more effective coordination mechanisms, build sustainable trust across borders, and navigate the tensions between efficiency and authenticity that define contemporary hybrid leadership.

References

- Avolio, B. J., Kahai, S., & Dodge, G. E. (2000). E-leadership: Implications for theory, research, and practice. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 11(4), 615–668.
- Bauwens, R., & Cortellazzo, L. (2025). E-leadership: A systematic review of six perspectives. *Human Resource Management Review*, 35(1), 101044.
- Bell, B. S., McAlpine, K. L., & Hill, N. S. (2023). Leading virtually. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 10, 339–362.
- Cortellazzo, L., Bruni, E., & Zampieri, R. (2019). The role of leadership in a digitalized world: A review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 1938.
- Cramton, C. D. (2001). The mutual knowledge problem and its consequences for dispersed collaboration. *Organization Science*, 12(3), 346–371.
- Dennis, A. R., Fuller, R. M., & Valacich, J. S. (2008). Media, tasks, and communication processes: A theory of media synchronicity. *MIS Quarterly*, 32(3), 575–600.

- Graen, G. B., & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader–member exchange (LMX) theory. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 6(2), 219–247.
- Gratton, L. (2021). How to do hybrid right. *Harvard Business Review*, 99(3), 66–74.
- Jarvenpaa, S. L., & Leidner, D. E. (1999). Communication and trust in global virtual teams. *Organization Science*, 10(6), 791–815.
- Malhotra, A., Majchrzak, A., & Rosen, B. (2007). Leading virtual teams. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 21(1), 60–70.
- Maznevski, M. L., & Chudoba, K. M. (2000). Bridging space over time: Global virtual team dynamics and effectiveness. *Organization Science*, 11(5), 473–492.
- Peiró, J. M., & Martínez-Tur, V. (2022). ‘Digitalized’ competences: A crucial challenge beyond digital competences. *Revista de Psicología del Trabajo y de las Organizaciones*, 38(1), 1–22.
- Stahl, G. K., Maznevski, M. L., Voigt, A., & Jonsen, K. (2010). Unraveling the effects of cultural diversity in teams: A meta-analysis. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 41(4), 690–709.