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Abstract

Female Leaders' Lived Experience of Transitioning to Leaders of Knowledge Workers in  
a Hybrid Workplace Model

by

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MBA, Athabasca University, 2010

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated changes to the nature of work, with many companies in the knowledge sector adopting a hybrid workplace model requiring leaders to adapt to this new normal. The problem explored in this study was the need to understand how the potential obstacles associated with leading in a hybrid workplace model may have affected female leaders' ability to navigate their career growth and advancement. The aim of this hermeneutic phenomenology was to understand and describe potential new barriers and opportunities female leaders must navigate and the potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style when transitioning from leading in a purely remote workplace during COVID-19 to a permanent hybrid workplace model. The conceptual framework included leadership theory, the Situational Leadership® style, the concept of gender equality in the workplace, and the hybrid workplace model. Data collection involved one-on-one, semistructured interviews with 18 female leaders from Toronto, Canada, who had transitioned to leading knowledge workers in a new hybrid workplace model. Twenty-three themes emerged from thematic data analysis, including discovering a new barrier to career growth related to decreased serendipitous career growth opportunities and uncovering the benefit of adopting a Situational Leadership® style based on empowering and building trust within a distributed team. Study findings may contribute to positive social change by providing female leaders with new knowledge that may help them better navigate career growth, and organizational leaders may better understand how to advance gender equality in a hybrid workplace model.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my soulmate and incredible husband, Danny. Thank you so much for your love and encouragement; it is because of you that I achieved one of my lifelong dreams: obtaining a PhD. From the faith you had in my potential to succeed, your support and understanding when I spent hours at the computer, to your love and ability to help me balance work and life, encouraging me at times to step away and recharge, this lifelong goal would never have been achieved without your support and love. I love you.

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To my nana and my dad, “Biker Doug,” two of the most precious and influential people in my life who I miss dearly. Without your unconditional love and support, I would not have achieved this goal; I only wish you were here to celebrate with me.

To female leaders and aspiring leaders who continue to face a more complex labyrinth along their career and personal growth journey. Progress has been made, but much more needs to be done. What I have come to learn through my personal life experiences and years of research is that as female leaders, the one thing we can do today and every day is to support one another intentionally; together, we can influence change and revolutionize the future of work.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
List of Figures .....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background of the Study .....	4
Gender Inequality During COVID-19 .....	6
The Great Resignation, Decreasing Employee Retention Rates.....	8
Leadership Style Required for a Hybrid Workplace Model .....	10
Problem Statement .....	15
Purpose of the Study .....	17
Research Questions .....	18
Conceptual Framework.....	19
E-Leadership Theory .....	19
Situational Leadership® Style .....	20
Gender Equality in the Workplace.....	21
Hybrid Workplace Model .....	22
Nature of the Study .....	26
Definitions.....	28
Assumptions.....	32
Scope and Delimitations .....	33
Limitations .....	35
Significance of the Study .....	38

Significance to Practice.....	38
Significance to Theory.....	39
Significance to Social Change .....	40
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	42
Literature Search Strategy.....	43
Conceptual Framework.....	47
Gender Equality in the Workplace.....	50
Hybrid Workplace Model .....	51
E-Leadership Theory and Situational Leadership® Style .....	52
Literature Review.....	56
Gender Equality in the Workplace and the COVID-19 Pandemic .....	56
Potential Barriers and Opportunities for Female Leaders Navigating the Workplace in a Future Post-COVID-19 Workplace.....	68
The Hybrid Workplace Operating Model and the Future of Work .....	71
Leadership in a Hybrid Workplace Model.....	111
Summary and Conclusions .....	140
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	142
Research Design and Rationale .....	143
Role of the Researcher .....	146
Methodology.....	150
Participant Selection Logic.....	152
Instrumentation .....	155

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	158
Data Analysis Plan.....	163
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	169
Credibility.....	169
Transferability.....	171
Dependability.....	172
Confirmability.....	173
Ethical Procedures.....	173
Summary.....	175
Chapter 4: Results.....	176
Research Setting.....	177
Demographics.....	179
Data Collection.....	180
Data Analysis.....	186
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	241
Study Results.....	247
Research Question 1.....	249
Research Question 2.....	298
Summary.....	335
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	337
Interpretation of Findings.....	340
Limitations of the Study.....	355

Recommendations.....	357
Recommendations for Research .....	357
Recommendations for Practice .....	359
Implications.....	367
Individual Level of Social Change .....	368
Organizational Level of Social Change .....	372
Societal and Policy Level of Social Change.....	373
Methodological, Empirical, and Empirical Implications.....	375
Conclusions.....	378
References.....	381
Appendix A: Study Overview.....	414
Appendix B: Interview Protocol.....	415
Appendix C: Study Participant Communication Email Templates .....	419
Appendix D: Participant Recruitment Advertisement Copy .....	422
Appendix E: Participant Recruitment Website.....	424
Appendix F: Interview Questions .....	429
Appendix G: Initial Codes for Research Questions 1 and 2.....	432
Appendix H: Code Framework for Research Questions 1 and 2.....	437
Appendix I: Data Triangulation Table.....	439

## List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics.....	179
Table 2. Participants' Industry Representation.....	185
Table 3. Research Question 1 Themes and Associated Interview Questions.....	194
Table 4. Research Question 1 Themes, Code Framework, and Interview Excerpts.....	196
Table 5. Research Question 2 Themes and Associated Interview Questions.....	210
Table 6. Research Question 2 Themes, Code Framework, and Interview Excerpts.....	212
Table 7. Themes Identified Related to Barriers Participants Experienced for Research Question 1 .....	251
Table 8. Themes Related to Opportunities Participants Experienced for Research Question 1 .....	278
Table 9. Themes Identified Related to Benefits of Situational Leadership® Style Participants Experienced for Research Question 2.....	299
Table G1. Initial Codes for Research Question 1 .....	432
Table G2. Initial Codes for Research Question 2 .....	435
Table H1. Code Framework for Research Question 1 .....	437
Table H2. Code Framework for Research Question 2.....	438
Table I1. Codes, Categories, and Themes for Research Question 1 .....	439
Table I2. Codes, Categories, and Themes for Research Question 2.....	447
Table J1. Categories and Themes for Research Question 1.....	452
Table J2. Categories and Themes for Research Question 2.....	457
Table K1. Triangulation of Data Findings for Research Question 1 .....	461

Table K2. Triangulation of Data Findings for Research Question 2 .....480

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework .....	23
Figure 2. Summary of Conceptual Framework.....	49
Figure 3. Team Typology and the Spectrum of Work Arrangements .....	94
Figure 4. Work Arrangements in Place and Time .....	97
Figure 5. The Building Blocks of a Hybrid Workforce .....	99
Figure 6. Situational Leadership® Model .....	124
Figure 7. SLII® Model .....	127
Figure 8. Thematic Map for Research Question 1 .....	228
Figure 9. Thematic Map for Research Question 2.....	233
Figure 10. Thematic Map Interconnections Between Research Questions 1 and 2.....	240
Figure D1. Participant Recruitment Advertisement.....	422
Figure E1. Participant Recruitment Website: Home Page Introduction.....	423
Figure E2. Participant Recruitment Website: Meet the Researcher & Are You Eligible to Participate?.....	424
Figure E2. Participant Recruitment Website: Participant Recruitment Advertisement .....	425
Figure E3. Participant Recruitment Website: A Study with a Social Good Purpose .....	426
Figure E4. Participant Recruitment Website: Contact Page .....	427

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The lockdown period during the COVID-19 pandemic created an unpredictable business climate, forcing many companies with knowledge workers to transition from operating in a largely traditional in-office workplace environment before finally moving to a hybrid workplace model (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Wyld, 2022). Research shows that knowledge workers have positively responded to having the flexibility to perform their jobs a portion of their time, either working in-office, working from home, or working from anywhere (Awada et al., 2021; Newbold et al., 2022). Many well-known companies have publicly committed to permanently adopting a hybrid workplace model (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021).

The shift towards a hybrid workplace model, according to scholars and practitioners alike, has implications beyond where employees physically operate and perform job-related tasks (Jackowska & Luring, 2021; Whillans et al., 2021); this new structure may impact gender equality for female leaders and the ideal leadership style, which both factors could potentially have an impact on the ability to retain top talent and allow for further career growth (Huang et al., 2022; Tessema et al., 2022). According to Carli (2020), qualifying the long-term impact that the COVID-19 pandemic may have on female leaders and gender equality in the workplace is problematic, given that the pandemic is a new phenomenon. The pandemic lockdown of businesses and schools may have negatively affected female leaders, potentially creating new barriers and opportunities to career growth and advancement (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020).

Identifying any new barriers and opportunities is important so that female leaders can learn how to navigate this new operating structure and environment, such as barriers associated with increased domestic responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Carli, 2020). Similarly, Soares and Sidun (2021) recognized that gender roles and domestic responsibilities could undermine leadership opportunities and the ability to engage in work, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, while Feng and Savani (2020) discovered that during the lockdown, female leaders reported having lower levels of “productivity and job satisfaction” (p. 719). Some of the early effects female leaders experienced during the pandemic included a dramatic increase during the lockdown of unpaid domestic responsibilities that female leaders were required to take on while also adapting to transitioning to a remote workplace and other associated workplace responsibilities during this uncertain time (Power, 2020). Based on recent knowledge emerging in academia, it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic is recognized as a catalyst for creating a new normal involving adopting a flexible operating model, which can potentially change the barriers and opportunities female leaders must navigate.

Research shows that leaders or organizations with knowledge workers are not only managing the emergence of the hybrid workplace model but also experiencing a rapid decline in employee retention. This trend began during the pandemic. According to Tessema et al. (2022), 41% of employees contemplated quitting, and 65% admitted actively seeking new employment opportunities in the United States. Klotz coined the term “The Great Resignation” to explain the sudden and significant decrease in employee retention in the COVID-19 pandemic era (Tessema et al., 2022). Researchers have

asserted that low retention rates experienced during the pandemic are partly related to the desire of knowledge workers to leave organizations that are not fully committed to permanently adopting a hybrid workplace model that allows for operating flexibility, enabling employees to choose where and when they work (Kulik, 2022; Tessema et al., 2022). The hybrid workplace model, according to scholars, is a new normal, a paradigm shift expected to have the potential for long-lasting implications on how organizations with a high percentage of their workforce being knowledge workers operate versus simply a trend that will pass with time but as a permanent mind shift towards a more flexible workplace as both the employees and employers desire a flexible operating structure (Gilson et al., 2021; Newbold et al., 2022).

Given that the hybrid workplace model, according to Mirčetić and Vukotic (2020), at this scale of adoption, is a relatively new approach to a flexible operating structure, scholars recognize that little is known concerning the ideal leadership style. Supporting this recognition of a knowledge gap, Bjursell et al. (2021) argued that a hybrid workplace model introduces new structures of power, requiring leaders and employees to evolve and adopt new skills. Several studies explain how the hybrid workplace presents an opportunity to explore the potential benefits of adopting a situational approach to leadership when leading knowledge workers who operate in-office, remotely, or in a combination of both (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020).

In this study, I focused on gender equality in the workplace. More specifically, I focused on creating new knowledge and insights that may support female leaders in

successfully navigating potentially new barriers and opportunities as they transition from a traditional in-office operating environment to a hybrid workplace model. The research generated from this study may contribute to the body of knowledge related to the potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model. Finally, this research may help the leaders of companies gain new insights that inform their efforts to achieve gender equality in the workplace.

Chapter 1 begins by including a background of the study, summarizing the research literature and the gap in knowledge related to the topic of this study. The following sections include the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, and definitions, providing a clear understanding of the study's specific area of focus. This chapter then summarizes definitions of key concepts and terms used within this study and presents assumptions that offer insight into the researcher's perspective, beliefs, and study conditions. Finally, this chapter describes the study's scope and delimitations, recognizes the study's limitations, and identifies the significance of the study and the research findings' potential for positively affecting social change.

### **Background of the Study**

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 virus as an official global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020), sending shock waves throughout companies in the knowledge economy across North America and around the world (Contreras et al., 2020). The declaration upended how businesses operate by initially forcing knowledge workers to rapidly transition from working in a traditional in-

office environment to a purely remote workplace and forever changing the future of work (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). Both scholars and business practitioners recognize the COVID-19 pandemic as potentially being one of the primary catalysts and accelerators toward adopting a hybrid workplace model that provides knowledge workers with the flexibility to divide their time working a portion of their time working in-office or their time working remotely from home or anywhere (Ng et al., 2021). The hybrid workplace model is quickly emerging, according to Wyld (2022), as a significant paradigm shift in how companies whose workforce comprises primarily of knowledge workers operate with many high-profile large companies across North America, having already publicly committed to permanently adopting a hybrid workplace model.

The transition to permanently adopting a hybrid workplace model during the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many leaders to adapt their leadership styles as they lead in this new normal (Stefan & Nazarov, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic may have widened gender inequality at the leadership level (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020), particularly in white-collar knowledge economies (Huang et al., 2022), which could have negatively affected employee retention (Huang et al., 2022). A leadership style required for the future of the hybrid workplace may require a focus on the specific needs of knowledge workers as they adapt to a new way of conducting business within companies where remote work and flexibility to work from the office or remotely were not the norm, along with also addressing the knowledge gap specific to the transition to a highly flexible operating structure from the perspective of female leaders and gender equality.

## Gender Inequality During COVID-19

Gender inequality in the workplace has existed for decades and remains an issue today; in a recent study, Erkal et al. (2021) confirmed that the gender gap in the workplace still exists with the participation of female leaders holding senior leadership positions as being “disappointingly low” (p. 13). According to Erkal et al., this is not a simple problem that can be solved with training programs. Additionally, Feng and Savani (2020) supported the concept of the gender gap by providing evidence that the pandemic has increased the amount of domestic household and childcare responsibilities during the lockdown, resulting in both remote work and school closures; therefore, remote learning placed increased pressures on women in the workplace in relation to balancing work and life in comparison to their male peers. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a regressive effect on gender equality in the workplace, with female leaders disproportionately negatively impacted by the pandemic (Pozen & Kochan, 2022). Eichenauer et al. (2022), in a quantitative study, discovered that female leaders are more apt to effectively lead during times of crisis, with most of the research existing on this topic relating to the metaphor of the “*glass cliff*” (p. 190). According to Madgavkar et al. (2020), female leaders during the pandemic were disproportionately responsible for family responsibilities and an increase in women choosing to leave the workforce, which has the potential to reverse gender equality in the workplace.

The previous progress made pre-COVID-19 towards closing gender equality is at risk of backtracking or being erased altogether; therefore, scholars are concerned that the gender inequality gap in the workplace could widen with the potential for an increased

level of gender inequality, specifically for women in senior leadership positions (Carli, 2020; Feng & Savani, 2020; Madgavkar et al., 2020). Mavin and Yusupova (2020) also raised the issue of the rise in patriarchy as a possible result of the pandemic that could negatively affect women in the workplace. According to scholars (e.g., Carli, 2020) and practitioners (e.g., Madgavkar, 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to create new barriers and opportunities that female leaders may be required to identify and learn to navigate successfully. Many studies published during and following the strict COVID-19 pandemic lockdown support the importance of gaining more knowledge related to the potential effect the pandemic could have on the gender gap in the workplace, with the potential reverse “decades-long trends toward gender equality in the workplace” (Feng & Savani, 2020, p. 729).

Given the evidence from both academia and practitioners that the unprecedented number and speed of female leaders transitioning to a permanent hybrid workplace model is a new phenomenon, there is a significant gap in knowledge concerning understanding the lived experience of female leaders from the perspective of any potential new barriers and opportunities they could face in this new flexible operating model (Feng & Savani, 2020; Madgavkar et al., 2020). Leaders need to learn to navigate the new flexible operating structure as they strive to lead successfully in this new normal while advancing their careers. Achieving gender equality in the workplace is complex, with multiple influences contributing to female leaders’ potential for success (Lee & Kray, 2021). Building upon the recognition of the complexity female leaders face, Lucia and Padgett (2021) applied the metaphor of “leadership labyrinth” (p. 104) as a framework for

exploring the intricacies and complexities female leaders face when navigating their careers with the recognition that it is only once barriers are identified solutions for removing such barriers can emerge.

The adoption of a hybrid workplace model, according to Zachariah et al. (2022), requires companies to establish new policies, procedures, and processes that have the potential to either positively or negatively affect female leaders and gender equality. Caringal-Go et al. (2021) also acknowledged the gap in understanding the ideal leadership competencies, traits, skills, and behaviors during the pandemic, a time of unprecedented crisis that has the potential to create a new normal. A knowledge gap exists regarding the optimal leadership style for leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020). This study focused on identifying potential barriers and opportunities female leaders may experience transitioning to leading in a hybrid workplace model, along with the discovery of potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style, which could allow for increased flexibility and capability to adopt a leadership style that best aligns with the hybrid workplace model.

### **The Great Resignation, Decreasing Employee Retention Rates**

According to scholars, organizations are experiencing record numbers of resignations and job changes among employees, namely knowledge workers (Kaplan, 2021). These record-low retention rates are experienced primarily by organizations in the knowledge economy across North America reluctant to transition to a hybrid workplace model that allows for more flexibility concerning where and when employees work (Serenko, 2022). Current research indicates that a significant number of knowledge

workers, particularly female leaders, are choosing to resign from organizations that have made the formal decision to return to a predominately in-office operating structure and accept new positions with companies committed to operating in a hybrid workplace model, allowing for a flexible operational structure (Huang et al., 2022). *The Great Resignation* is a term coined by Klotz (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021) that speaks to a new phenomenon involving an unprecedented rate of knowledge workers resigning. This Great Resignation refers to the lack of employee engagement primarily that took place during the pandemic as organizations transitioned to purely remote operating structures and the desire by employees to leave organizations with ridged in-office requirements in search of more flexible operating structures such as the hybrid workplace model (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021). The drivers connected to the shifts in employee retention rates also involve employees' desire to re-valuate their careers while working predominantly in a remote setting at the beginning of COVID-19, which may prove to provide further evidence that the hybrid workplace model is becoming the new normal for companies in the knowledge economy across North America (Tessema et al., 2022).

Scholars are beginning to discover an increase in female leaders taking on a more significant proportion of unpaid family responsibilities, which increased during the pandemic, placing considerable pressure on work–life balance (Appelbaum & Emadi-Mahabadi, 2022). This shift can potentially affect gender parity and female leaders' ability to advance their careers (Appelbaum & Emadi-Mahabadi, 2022). Hybrid workplace models may provide female leaders with the increased flexibility necessary to determine where and when they perform their jobs, which has the potential to help them

better balance unpaid family responsibilities with work roles and expectations and achieve better work–life balance (Alsulami et al., 2023).

### **Leadership Style Required for a Hybrid Workplace Model**

The hybrid workplace model is emerging as a critical future operating structure for many companies in the knowledge economy; Claus (2021) questioned the potential need for a “new leadership paradigm” (p. 162) because of the COVID-19 pandemic and shift to a flexible operating structure. The wide adoption of the hybrid workplace model during the COVID-19 pandemic is a new phenomenon, making it challenging to know the ideal leadership style for this type of flexible operating structure, according to Contreras et al. (2020), given that the study of leadership has primarily been focused on leaders operating in a traditional in-office environment (Contreras et al., 2020). The role of a leader, according to Mirčetić and Vukotic (2020), is to “encourage, guide, and motivate subordinates” (p. 94) while also setting goals, objectives, and tasks that align with the vision and mission of the organization. According to Wyld (2022), the transition to a new normal involving the option of a more flexible operating structure affects the ideal leadership style in the new future of the hybrid workplace model, including “the way we work, the way we organize, and the way we manage” (p. 9).

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the sudden and unprecedented transition initially to a purely remote workplace environment created a situation where some leaders were faced with a need to adapt their leadership style to the new normal (Kozlowski et al., 2021), embracing an e-leadership style that, according to Contreras et al. (2020) makes it possible for leaders to quickly adapt to the needs of leading a team

from a distance. Some scholars have recognized e-leadership as not simply an extension of other traditional leadership theories but a leadership style capable and unique enough to stand on its own (Contreras et al., 2020). The e-leadership style allows leaders to adjust how knowledge workers relate and communicate (Mustajab et al., 2020) with one another and other key stakeholder groups critical in a predominately remote workplace environment with little to no physical connection in person.

The pandemic forced many organizations to operate remotely. Now that the pandemic restrictions have loosened, according to scholars, a paradigm shift is taking place, with many organizations that rely heavily on knowledge workers across North America publicly committing to the permanent adoption of a hybrid workplace model (Luo et al., 2021; Semsøy, 2022; Smite et al., 2022). Whillans et al. (2021) observed that the pandemic was a catalyst for the accelerated adoption of a new future of work, including where, when, and how work is performed. The change associated with adopting a hybrid workplace model may provide companies with an opportunity to reassess all elements of their existing pre-COVID-19 pandemic operating structure, including the potential for adopting a more decentralized leadership model and a leadership style that supports collaboration in a flexible operating model (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). According to Zachariah et al. (2022), the leaders of many organizations lack the experience or awareness of how to successfully implement a hybrid workplace model. For many, this operational change was a requirement for survival during the lockdown, versus a longer term, well-planned strategic initiative.

Zachariah et al. (2022) and Caringal-Go et al. (2021) both stated that the hybrid workplace model places a high level of importance on strong leaders helping to navigate the implementation and operations of this flexible operating structure to ensure that companies remain productive, and employees can adapt and thrive during the uncertain period of change. This shift represents one of the most significant changes to leadership in modern history, according to Vidhyaa and Ravichandran (2022), with some companies introducing new terms that refer to the hybrid workplace model, such as (a) *flexible*, (b) *fixed*, (c) *office-first*, or (d) *remote-first models* (Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022). Given the historic nature of this shift to hybrid workplace models, a lack of awareness of the impact on female leaders requires more attention to ensure that companies continue to progress towards achieving equality in the workplace (Feng & Savani, 2020). Based on academic studies, a paradigm shift may occur (Claus, 2021), creating a need for a greater understanding of the future operating models and leadership styles that will align with the new, more flexible workplace. New evidence is beginning to emerge that illustrates how the hybrid workplace model benefits knowledge workers and organizations but requires different leadership skills suitable for a more flexible and dynamic operating structure (Urhan, 2023). A knowledge gap exists regarding the ideal leadership style for leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model (Wyld, 2022).

In this study, I explored the potential benefits of adopting the Situational Leadership® style within the context of the hybrid workplace model, an adaptable leadership theory originating in 1969 from a collaboration between Dr. Paul Hersey and Dr. Ken Blanchard, with co-authoring of a “book that introduced The Situational

Leadership® Model” (*Relevant then, relevant now.*, 2019, para. 3). Hersey and Blanchard cooperated on the creation of practical models and frameworks for adopting a Situational Leadership® approach to leadership until the year 1979 (*Blanchard’s 40+ years of history*, 2024) at which point they choose to part ways with Blanchard leaving The Center for Situational Leadership Studies® to “start a company called Blanchard Training and Development, Inc. with his wife Margie Blanchard” (*The history of the Situational Leadership® framework*, 2024, para. 18); known today as Blanchard® offering the SLII® Model (*SLII®*, 2024). The Situational Leadership® style is helpful to leaders in navigating complex and changing workplace environments; as such, it is a leadership style that is conducive to the evolving hybrid workplace model (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020).

Few researchers have investigated the benefits of female leaders adopting a Situational Leadership® style when transitioning to a hybrid workplace model, a new and complex operating environment during and following COVID-19 (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020). Adopting a Situational Leadership® style allows leaders to adapt their approach to leading to meet the specific needs of a flexible operating structure with high unpredictability, change, and ambiguity in a hybrid workplace model (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020). A situational approach to leadership involves adapting the approach to leading “depending on the type of followers and situational factors” (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020, p. 95), ideal for a dynamic and rapidly changing hybrid workplace model. Understanding the ideal leadership style for the future of the hybrid workplace may be essential for the long-term success of both the organizations and employees.

This study was needed because adopting a hybrid workplace model at this scale as a new permanent operating structure is a new phenomenon, with little research on this topic. However, one sector that has the potential to offer some insight into a hybrid workplace model is academia, more specifically online learning, which has, for decades had professors operating both in-office, in-class, and remotely (Ali, 2023; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Many academics have operated for decades in a hybrid workplace model with the wide adoption of distance learning, allowing professors to teach in-person and remote classes and collaborate with research teams at both local and international levels. According to my review of the literature, researchers have not focused on understanding the lived experience of female leaders navigating the potential barriers and opportunities associated with the transition to a hybrid workplace model, nor is there any substantial research on Situational Leadership® style and the potential benefits for female leaders using this leadership style when transitioning to leading in a hybrid workplace model.

I addressed a knowledge gap related to understanding the lived experience of female leaders of knowledge workers, the associated challenges they experienced transitioning to a hybrid workplace model, and the potential benefits of following a Situational Leadership® style. Regarding positive social change, this study may contribute to the body of knowledge related to gender equality and, more specifically, to the understanding of how to close the gender gap in the hybrid workplace model. According to Erkal et al. (2021), achieving diversity in leadership has a positive economic impact from a business performance perspective. This study provides new

knowledge concerning gaining a greater understanding of the hybrid workplace model from the perspective of female leaders.

### **Problem Statement**

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the future of work. Organizations within the knowledge-based economy across North America faced an unprecedented disruption, with record numbers of organizational leaders committing to permanently adopting a hybrid workplace model (Newbold et al., 2022), giving knowledge workers the flexibility to work in-office and remotely (Vyas, 2022). Providing further evidence of the viability of the wide adoption of a hybrid workplace model, according to scholars Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020), employees believe they can complete 60%–70% of their workload remotely (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). According to researchers Erkal et al. (2021), the gender gap in the workplace still exists, specifically concerning women holding leadership positions. From a gender equality perspective, the broad adoption of a hybrid workplace model today and in the future post-COVID-19 era has significant implications for gender equality in the workplace (Feng & Savani, 2020). Early studies published at the pandemic's start disclose that many female leaders may have experienced higher levels of psychological stress and increased levels of non-paid household responsibilities (Afshan et al., 2021).

Understanding the effect that COVID-19 and, more specifically, the transition to a hybrid workplace model could have on female leaders is essential, given that according to the 2022 World Economic Forum's study on global gender equality, gender parity is expected at the current pace to take 132 years to achieve (World Economic Forum, 2022).

The hybrid workplace model of the future has the potential to have many ripple effects across the entire ecosystem of each company that transitions to this new operating structure that should be identified and successfully managed. This transition to a new normal, according to Feng and Savani (2020), makes it of greater importance for “management researchers and practitioners to pay careful attention” (Feng & Savani, 2020, p. 729).

The future of work as a flexible hybrid workplace model might affect the ideal leadership style required, particularly for companies transitioning from an in-office structure to an operating model that allows for in-office and remote working (Claus, 2021). According to Zachariah et al. (2022), each hybrid model is structured to meet each company's specific and unique needs, placing more demand on the need for leaders to adapt to the change and help companies adjust their corporate culture. A knowledge gap exists related to understanding the ideal leadership style that best suits the wide adoption by companies, predominately in the knowledge economy that are embracing the new hybrid workplace model. Given that many companies individualize their hybrid workplace model, a standardized leadership guidebook is needed for those leaders transitioning to the new operating model to follow (Mustajab et al., 2020). The knowledge gap is significant because the pandemic required many leaders also adapt to leading during a time of unpredicted change and crisis (Caringal-Go et al., 2021).

Based on a comprehensive literature review, there is a lack of research and knowledge about understanding the lived experiences of female leaders in Toronto, Canada, who transitioned at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic to leading knowledge

workers initially in a predominately remote workplace to adapting to leading in a flexible hybrid workplace model. The problem is that female leaders' career growth and advancement are potentially at risk if they cannot identify and successfully navigate any new barriers and opportunities while also adapting their leadership style to meet the needs of leading in a hybrid workplace model (Carli, 2020; Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Feng & Savani, 2020). This research may effect positive social change by contributing to the body of knowledge on the hybrid workplace model and the potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style in this new flexible operating structure, all from the perspective of female leaders.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenology qualitative study was to understand and describe through the exploration of lived experiences any potential new barriers and opportunities female leaders must navigate when transitioning from leading in a purely remote workplace during COVID-19 to leading in a permanent hybrid workplace model, along with understanding and describing any potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style. I explored the phenomenon of gender inequality in the workplace, at senior leadership levels, within the context of the unprecedented workplace revolution involving a paradigm shift accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic toward the adoption of a hybrid workplace model, a new flexible operating structure that has the potential to impact gender equality in the workplace (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Mavin & Yusupova, 2020; Wyld, 2022). Given that the transition to a hybrid workplace model at this scale is a new phenomenon, little is known about how this new

operating structure may affect the already complex labyrinth female leaders must navigate when seeking to advance into senior leadership positions or the overall impact the operating structure will have on gender equality in the workplace (Carli, 2020). In conducting this study, I sought to gain a deeper level of understanding of the lived experience of female leaders in Toronto, Canada, who had experienced transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model and the potential new barriers, opportunities, and benefits associated with applying a Situational Leadership® style as they seek to successfully navigate their career growth and advancement in a hybrid workplace model.

### **Research Questions**

A new future of work is emerging for knowledge-based organizations driven in part by the COVID-19 pandemic—a new future focused on permanently adopting a hybrid workplace model that enables knowledge workers to perform their jobs remotely and in-office (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). Gender equality in the workplace, according to scholars, has been a critical issue and concern for many organizations before COVID-19 (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020), particularly during the pandemic as research emerged confirming that many female leaders have been more affected by the pandemic than their male counterparts (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020) including the unequal division of domestic duties (Collins et al., 2021). A level of uncertainty exists concerning the effect of adopting a hybrid workplace model on female leaders and overall gender equality (Brooks & Saad, 2020; Collins et al., 2021). In this study I sought to identify new barriers and opportunities female leaders must navigate and discover the benefits of

adopting a Situational Leadership® style (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020) by exploring two research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are female leaders' lived experiences with identifying new barriers and opportunities they must navigate when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada, to adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

RQ2: What are the benefits of female leaders adopting a Situational Leadership® style when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada, while adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The theories and concepts that grounded this study were e-leadership theory, a leadership style that relies heavily on technology and involves leading teams in a remote operating structure (Torre & Sarti, 2020); the Situational Leadership® style through the creation of practical models and frameworks developed by Hersey and Blanchard (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020); the concept of gender equality in the workplace (Bastida et al., 2019); and the hybrid workplace model (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021).

### **E-Leadership Theory**

The theory of e-leadership is not a new phenomenon but is still in its infancy and evolving compared to other more established leadership theories (Ionela, 2021). At the heart of e-leadership is the application of technology as a critical element of leading a team (Torre & Sarti, 2020). Hacker et al. (2020) recognized the importance of technology as bridging the gap between the office and working remotely (Hacker et al., 2020).

Kulshreshtha and Sharma (2021) acknowledged the potential risk of relying solely on leading in a remote operating structure, identifying the importance of having some in-person connections and thus recognizing the importance of a hybrid workplace model. Because e-leadership is a phenomenon that “is still going through the phase of evolution” (Ionela, 2021, p. 97), more scholarly research is required, particularly on how this leadership theory relates to the hybrid workplace model.

### **Situational Leadership® Style**

When looking at leadership styles that allow for the high level of flexibility and adaptability required for a hybrid workplace model, the Situational Leadership® style may offer a potential fit as this leadership style allows leaders to adapt their style of leadership based upon the nature of the current situation and the specific characteristics of each individual follower (Claus, 2021; Hakim et al., 2021). Dr. Paul Hersey and Dr. Ken Blanchard launched The Center for Leadership Studies® in 1969, developing a practical model and frameworks for adopting a Situational Leadership® style, including the Situational Leadership® Model (*Relevant then, relevant now.*, 2019). In 1979, Ken Blanchard, in partnership with his wife Margie Blanchard, founded a company called Blanchard Training and Development, Inc., now called Blanchard® (*Blanchard's 40+ years of history*, 2024). In 1985, Blanchard's company launched a modified model to help guide leaders in adopting a Situational Leadership® style called the SLII® Model (*Blanchard's 40+ years of history*, 2024). Given that the Situational Leadership® style allows leaders to adapt to the individual needs of each follower and individual environmental considerations (Thompson & Glasø, 2018), it is a leadership style that has

the potential to adapt to the new flexible operating structure found in the hybrid workplace model.

### **Gender Equality in the Workplace**

Achieving gender equality in the workplace is essential from a social good perspective, benefiting both the female employees and the company. Academia and practitioners have been studying the gender gap for decades in an attempt to close the gender gap (Grangeiro et al., 2021a; Huang et al., 2022). According to a study conducted annually since 2015 by LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, female leaders in the workplace need to be more represented in leadership positions, and barriers do exist that are holding them back from career advancement (Huang et al., 2022). Companies are experiencing a “great breakup” (Huang et al., 2022, p. 5), with women at unprecedented numbers deciding to quit for jobs for new positions in organizations that better meet their needs for greater flexibility. According to Alsulami et al. (2023), who conducted a study looking at women in academics and the effect of a flexible workplace in the future post-COVID-19 world, achieving social sustainability, “flexibility at work has become a central concern of many governments, scholars, and employers” (p. 1). The purpose of identifying and understanding any possible new barriers or opportunities for female leaders to navigate their career journey is to ensure that the workplace of tomorrow understands how best to support female leaders and achieve gender equality in the workplace.

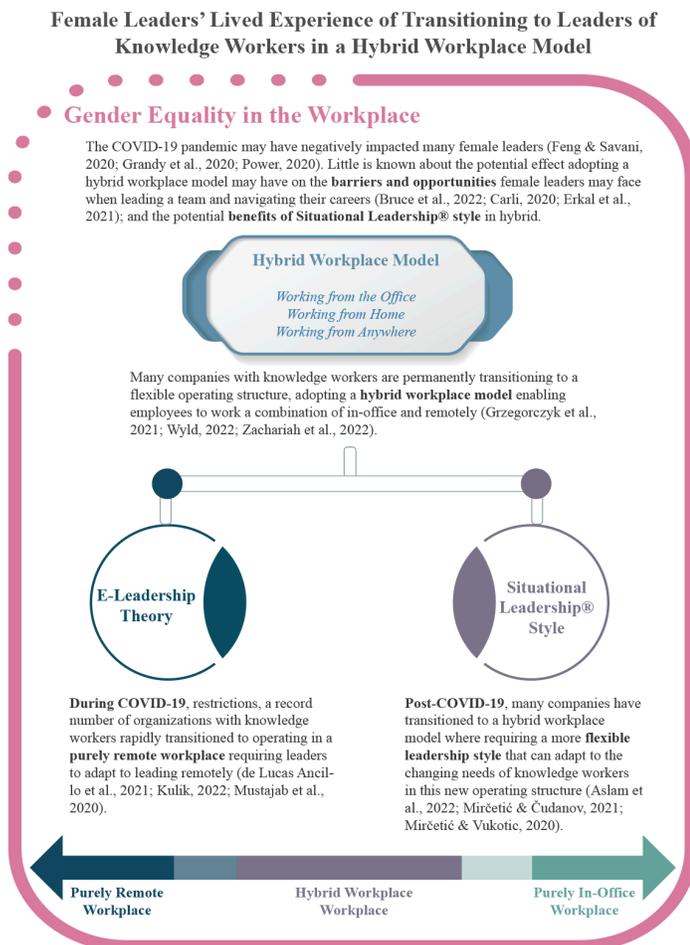
## **Hybrid Workplace Model**

The way knowledge workers perform their jobs has fundamentally and radically changed since the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergence of the hybrid workplace model is a concept that is quickly becoming the “new normal” (Vyas, 2022, p. 155).

Organizations across North America have begun transitioning toward the adoption of a permanent hybrid workplace model that meets their individual needs and requirements (Newbold et al., 2022) as a “one-size-fits-all hybrid model” (Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022, p. 292) does not exist. The hybrid workplace model has gained new importance during the COVID-19 pandemic as more companies commit to adopting an operating model that includes working from home, in-office, and anywhere (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). Given that the hybrid workplace model at this scale is a new phenomenon, more scholarly research is required, including understanding how it affects female leaders' ability to advance their careers. Figure 1 illustrates the four concepts, theories, and leadership models that underpinned my research and data analysis of this study.

## Figure 1

### Conceptual Framework



*Note.* The concept of gender equality in the workplace (Feng & Savani, 2020; Grandy et al., 2020; Power, 2020) and barriers and opportunities female leaders face (Bruce et al., 2022; Carli, 2020; Erkal et al., 2021); the concept of the hybrid workplace model (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021; Wyld, 2022; Zachariah et al., 2022); e-leadership theory (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Kulik, 2022; Mustajab et al., 2020); and Situational Leadership® style (Aslam et al., 2022; Mirčetić & Čudanov, 2021; Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020).

The conceptual framework involves four critical concepts, theories, and leadership styles, beginning with the concept of gender equality in the workplace (Huang et al., 2022); the concept of the hybrid workplace model (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021); e-leadership theory a leadership style focused on leading in remote operating structures (Contreras et al., 2020); and Situational Leadership® style, with practical models for applying a Situational Leadership® approach created by Hersey and Blanchard (Mirčetić & Čudanov, 2021). Each one of these concepts, theories, and leadership styles related to my research problem and purpose of a lack of understanding of the lived experience of female leaders in Toronto, Canada, who are leading knowledge workers who have transitioned from leading in a traditional in-office workplace environment to leading in a hybrid workplace model.

More specifically, the concept of gender equality in the workplace includes recognizing many barriers that exist today that present challenges to achieving gender equality in the workplace that female leaders may be required to learn how to navigate and thrive in the workplace (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020), along with many opportunities that have emerged over time that are helping female leaders to advance to senior leadership positions in their careers (Samuelson et al., 2019). Given that scholars describe the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the most significant events of our time, so substantial that this new operating model has the potential to influence the future of work, more specifically, the future of the flexible operating structure (Vyas, 2022). The changes in the workplace, including the increased adoption of a hybrid workplace model may affect

the barriers and opportunities female leaders must navigate as they strive to advance their careers and as companies seek to achieve gender equality (Alon et al., 2020).

Exploring the new and evolving hybrid workplace model provides valuable insight and understanding into the specific operating model female leaders must navigate. What makes the hybrid workplace model so challenging is that one-size-does-not-fit-all (Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022), given the lack of a set of formal, well-established hybrid workplace model operating structures. Understanding a hybrid model's fundamental components is critical to understanding how to lead within this flexible operating structure. Exploring e-leadership theory is essential as the hybrid workplace model requires leaders to lead knowledge workers who divide their time between working in-office and spending much of their time in a remote environment (Contreras et al., 2020; Ionela, 2021).

Finally, the Situational Leadership® style may benefit female leaders who are transitioning to leading in a hybrid workplace model (Mirčetić & Čudanov, 2021; Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020). This conceptual framework helped to support my qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study by acting as a guide, which helped to address meaningful gaps in knowledge related to a lack of empirical data on the effect of transitioning from female leaders leading in a traditional in-office environment to a hybrid workplace model. This study resulted in new knowledge that might help female leaders of knowledge workers successfully navigate new barriers and opportunities and identify potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style when transitioning to a hybrid workplace model.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study used a hermeneutic phenomenology design to explore and describe the lived experiences of female leaders in Toronto, Canada, leading knowledge workers who have transitioned from leading in a traditional in-office workplace environment to leading in a hybrid workplace model (Reiners, 2012). Hermeneutic phenomenology made it possible to understand the barriers and opportunities female leaders may be required to navigate and discover potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style when operating in a hybrid workplace model in Toronto based on their lived experiences. The primary data collection method involved in-depth semi-structured one-on-one interviews with purposefully selected study participants, as well as applying a snowball sampling approach (Eatough & Smith, 2008) to ensure that participants were randomly selected. I followed all ethical compliance rules and regulations outlined by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) during the data-gathering and analysis stages.

Study participants involved female leaders in Toronto who have transitioned from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment to a hybrid workplace model. The study participants held mid-level and senior-level management positions and had some experience with the Situational Leadership® style. Study participants worked within companies located in Toronto that have publicly committed to permanently adopting a hybrid workplace model. Regarding the sampling strategy, this study used both purposeful and snowball sampling. The purposeful sampling strategy involved participant selection and initial recruitment based on identifying participants who have experienced transitioning from leading in a face-to-face environment to a hybrid

workplace model during the COVID-19 pandemic. Strong relationships have been established with The Center for Leadership Studies® and female leadership organizations such as Coralus (formerly SheEO), Forward Together, and the Universal Women's Network. During each interview, participants were asked if they could recommend prospective female leader participants as part of a snowball sampling strategy. Study participants also derived from the promotion of the study on LinkedIn.

According to Peoples (2021), in hermeneutic phenomenological studies, the traditional range of participants falls within 10 to 15 participants to achieve the appropriate level of research saturation; however, this study involved 18 participants. A detailed and documented description of each study participant was created without providing any information that could unintentionally disclose information that could identify participants. Participants were given access to transcripts of their interviews within 24 hours of their interview to ensure the accuracy of the information gathered for the study (Peoples, 2021). Detailed participant criteria and a recruitment plan were created to help identify prospective participants.

I collected primary data by conducting one-on-one, in-depth, semistructured interviews with participants via Zoom teleconferencing. I used Zoom and GarageBand software system to audio record each interview. Interview protocols were followed, including the transcriptions of interviews using the transcription service Scribie.com, the creation of an interview guide, research study journal notes, interview notes, interview observational and audit notes during the interview, research memos, along with other detailed working notes, which I captured using the Microsoft OneNote software program

(Alase, 2017). Study participants were given copies of their transcribed interviews and asked to make any necessary corrections or clarifications to enhance rigor and reliability. Secondary data beyond the comprehensive literature review of peer-reviewed journal articles included documents provided by participants or public/private sector industry organizations such as The Center for Leadership Studies<sup>®</sup>, which gave me access to relevant data through educational videos and leadership training materials.

Additional technical resources included the use of Adobe Illustrator, which was used to create supporting illustrations. Thematic analysis of primary and secondary data involved coding initially manually in Excel, followed by coding and analysis software called NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). Results from this study contributed to the body of knowledge concerning how female leaders in Toronto can successfully adapt to transitioning from leading a team in a traditional in-office workplace environment to a hybrid workplace model by offering new knowledge and insights that may positively impact gender equality in the workplace.

### **Definitions**

The following terms are critical to this study and benefit from further clarification:

*Black swan*: An infrequent and rare event that can potentially have severe and widespread effects, often resulting in significant change and high uncertainty levels (Wyld, 2022).

*COVID-19 pandemic*: A global pandemic that was declared on March 11, 2020, by the World Health Organization (*WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at the*

*Media Briefing on COVID-19*, 2020). COVID-19 is a highly contagious and potentially deadly virus that initially forced many businesses to adopt a purely remote workplace and subsequently led to the decision for many organizations to transition to a hybrid workplace model permanently (Wyld, 2022).

*E-leadership*: A leadership style and practice where the leaders are primarily responsible for leading a team in a predominately remote workplace operating structure or e-environment where working relies heavily on technology (Contreras et al., 2020; Torre & Sarti, 2020).

*Environmental, social, and governance (ESG)*: An organization's commitment to achieving social good by setting social good, performance, and profitability-driven goals (Nicolò et al., 2021). ESG goals concerning this study will focus mainly on achieving gender equality in the workplace.

*Flexible work arrangements*: Workplaces that offer employees the flexibility to alter where and when they work within previously agreed-upon rules and corporate human resource policies (Tessema et al., 2022).

*Gender equality in the workplace*: The achievement of gender equality in all roles within an organization, but more specifically, in this study, the importance of equality in leadership and decision-making positions in all industries and sectors (Huang et al., 2022).

*Glass ceiling*: A metaphor that describes the challenges and struggles female leaders experience compared to their male counterparts when they strive to advance their careers and rise to hold senior executive decision-making positions of power. The glass

ceiling metaphor also speaks to gender inequality in the workplace (Grangeiro et al., 2021a).

*The Great Resignation:* A new term coined by Klotz in 2021 to refer to challenges with retaining employees during the COVID-19 pandemic amid an increase in the number of employees changing jobs and careers (Tessema et al., 2022; Wyld, 2022).

*Hybrid work environment:* An organization that has embraced a highly flexible operating structure where employees are allowed to work both from the office and remotely (Effner & Havriljak, 2022; Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021; Verma et al., 2022).

*Hybrid workers:* Individual employees who are working within a hybrid workplace model and work from the office and remotely (Rudnicka et al., 2020; Wontorzczuk & Rożnowski, 2022; Yawson, 2022).

*Hybrid workplace model:* A business operating model that allows employees to divide their time between working from in-office, or working remotely from home or from anywhere (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021; Kumar, 2022; Zachariah et al., 2022).

*Knowledge worker:* An employee whose role primarily revolves around working with knowledge and which relies on the employee’s intellectual capabilities making it possible to perform their job from anywhere with the help of technology (Issahaka & Lines, 2020). Seminal theorist Drucker introduced in the year 1994 the term “knowledge worker” (Issahaka & Lines, 2020, p. 18).

*Labyrinth of leadership:* A new metaphor to replace the outdated glass ceiling metaphor created by seminal theorists Carli and Eagly (2016). The labyrinth of leadership relates to the barriers and enablers female leaders experience as they try to navigate a

complex workplace that, at times, creates obstacles that affect female leaders and negatively affect gender equality in the workplace (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020).

*Remote-first*: A new term for organizations with an operating structure that encourages employees to work predominately in a remote operating structure and only occasionally from the office, based on agreed-upon employee and employer policies and preferences (Wyld, 2022).

*Remote workplace*: In the hybrid workplace model, the ability to work from home and/or other locations; this ability simplifies the hybrid model to two primary operating options: (a) working in-office or (b) working remotely (Maduka et al., 2018).

*Situational Leadership® style*: Refers to the general concept of adopting a leadership approach that adapts to a particular situation and individual follower or team's unique attributes related to "task and relationships behaviours" (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020, p. 98). Two different models that offer a practical framework for practicing the Situational Leadership® style of leadership include (a) the Situational Leadership® Model, provided by The Center for Situational Leadership Studies® (*Situational Leadership®*, 2024), and (b) The SLII® Model by Blanchard® (*Blanchard®*, 2024).

*Telepresence*: The ability of employees to perform their tasks remotely using technology and other digital innovations (Gilson et al., 2021).

*Traditional in-office workplace environment*: An environment in which employees work from an office space with other team members, typically working between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Leach et al., 2021).

*Working asynchronously*: The ability of employees to work remotely from anywhere in an independent manner (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021).

*Working remotely*: Within this study, a term that refers to working from home and anywhere, with the requirement that the employee work from somewhere other than a physical office space (Adekoya et al., 2022).

*Working synchronously*: The ability of employees to work remotely but together at the same time and alongside one another, working collaboratively (Gilson et al., 2021).

### **Assumptions**

This study made several assumptions, beginning with the assumption that participants of this study had firsthand experience leading in a traditionally in-office environment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The other major assumption related to study participants having firsthand experience rapidly transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a purely remote workplace due to the pandemic restrictions, followed by transitioning to permanently leading a team of knowledge workers capable of working from anywhere in a hybrid workplace model. Other study assumptions included the belief that study participants would answer interview questions openly and honestly, that participants were knowledgeable and experienced, and that participants were seasoned leaders with at least 10 years of leadership experience. Concerning the infrastructure, the assumptions included an assumption that all participants worked within well-established organizations with access to all the necessary technologies necessary to operate in-office and remote environments and could use the technologies to communicate and collaborate in a hybrid workplace model effectively and productively. An assumption was also made

that the adoption of a hybrid workplace model operating structure predominantly affects knowledge workers, and there will be a need for leaders in this new flexible operating model to adapt their leadership style to meet the specific needs of the evolving hybrid workplace model with limited experience. Finally, an assumption was made that all leaders transitioning to a hybrid workplace model recognize the need for a new leadership style that better aligns with the needs of employees in this relatively unknown and highly flexible operating structure.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this study was narrowly focused on understanding the lived experience of female leaders who have the experience of transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment to adapting to leading in a hybrid workplace model. The study focused on exploring the knowledge gap related to understanding any potential new barriers and opportunities female leaders must navigate (Mustajab et al., 2020; Park, 2022) in the hybrid workplace model, along with identifying potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020) when leading knowledge workers while adapting to a hybrid workplace model (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). This study provides new knowledge that can help female leaders successfully navigate and lead in the new future of work, which involves adopting the flexible operating structure, recognized as the hybrid workplace model. The boundary of this qualitative phenomenology study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 18 participants comprised of female leaders who lead knowledge workers from Toronto, who work for companies that have committed to the permanent adoption of a

hybrid workplace model and have experienced the transition from a traditional in-office environment to a hybrid workplace model. The theories and concepts included in this study as part of the conceptual framework and comprehensive literature review included the e-leadership theory (Contreras et al., 2020); the Situational Leadership® style (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020); the concept of gender equality in the workplace (Huang et al., 2022); and the concept of a hybrid workplace model (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). A combination of purposeful and snowball sampling was used to attract study participants, and a thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews was conducted to analyze research data.

Excluded from the boundary of this study, most notably, the primary delimitation of this study involved not investigating the lived experience of female leaders leading in companies that have not publicly committed to the permanent adoption of a hybrid workplace model and those companies that do not have most of their workforce comprising of knowledge workers who can work remotely. Therefore, the study did not include participants operating in a purely remote or in-office structure. This study did not explore any other leadership styles beyond e-leadership theory and Situational Leadership® style, and participants included only female leaders and not any subordinates. Finally, this study did not investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic could have affected any other leadership styles or approaches beyond e-leadership and Situational Leadership® style. This study is expected to be transferable given the use of “thick descriptions” (Lincoln & Guba, 1988) of the participant profile, data collection

approach, and outline of the data analysis procedures, along with explaining researcher interpretations related to conducting and analyzing the study findings.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations in this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study such as: (a) this qualitative study, by its very nature, is constrained to studying the lived experiences of a smaller sample size in comparison to that of quantitative studies, although this also allows for more in-depth analysis (Dibley et al., 2020); (b) phenomenology involves conducting an interpretive approach that requires the researcher intentionally ensures that there is no bias or presupposed conclusions (Laverly, 2003); (c) conducting face-to-face semi-structured interviews can be time-consuming and generally a significant amount of data to code and analyze; (d) the potential exists for participants to share inaccurate reflections or tell lies during the interview; (e) given that the hybrid workplace model of today is a relatively new phenomenon there is limited access to research and data in both academia and the private sector (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021); (f) time limitations for conducting all interviews which were completed within 11 weeks; (g) study was limited to interviewing female leaders from companies that are operating in a hybrid workplace model and conduct business in Toronto, which has the potential with its limited scope to affect the transferability; and (h) as a researcher this was my first qualitative research study in an academic environment, which could affect research process (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). Limitations were at the forefront of my mind and were managed throughout this study's data-gathering and analysis stages.

The limitation of time constraints was managed by organizing and establishing procedures for conducting interviews and detailed analysis immediately following each interview, ensuring only one interview was conducted per day. Managing the potential for inaccurate information from study participants involved creating an environment where participants could feel comfortable being open and honest; each interview stayed on time, and an effort was made to be careful to allow participants an opportunity to speak without interruption and effort was made to listen carefully to ensure the information provided by participants was interpreted accurately. Clarifying questions were asked during interviews and throughout the study, and a detailed reflective journal was maintained. Care was taken to ensure that any relevant research studies that emerged during the study were reviewed and included in the literature review, as the hybrid workplace model is an emerging phenomenon. Finally, this study included the application of triangulation, member checks with participants, reflexivity, bracketing, and peer reviews to increase the reliability of the research.

Many companies are in the process of identifying what the future of flexible operating structures will look like for their organization and within their unique industry; this uncertainty and potential for change could harm the dependability of the study, given that this area of study is a new phenomenon and the hybrid workplace model continues to evolve (Kniffin et al., 2021). This study could prove to be highly transferable given that a record number of companies rely heavily on knowledge workers across North America and internationally, have experienced the transition initially to a purely remote model, which was followed by the adoption of a hybrid workplace model because of the

COVID-19 pandemic disrupting the future of work, making a more flexible operating structure highly desirable by both the employer and employees (Santos & Ralph, 2022). It is essential to recognize that the hybrid workplace model is in its infancy and continues to change and evolve creating a higher-than-average level of uncertainty (Wethal et al., 2022) about how the hybrid workplace model of the future will be structured (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2022) including potentially how power structures will align more specifically what the “roles and responsibilities” (Bjursell et al., 2021, p. 6) will be for managers and leaders.

Concerning potential biases, it is essential to acknowledge that I have considerable experience working remotely and have spent the past decade researching and exploring the gender gap in the workplace to understand why companies struggle with achieving gender equality, specifically advancing female leaders into senior leadership positions. Full disclosure was provided to mitigate any potential researcher bias by providing full disclosure as the researcher into any pre-conceived thoughts, perspectives, assumptions, and experiences that could affect my ability to analyze research findings. Bias was also mitigated by keeping detailed observational field notes and maintaining a journal throughout the study. The practice of bracketing was conducted to maintain a highly ethical study, which involved identifying any personal biases, preconceptions, and personal experiences related to the phenomenon being studied and included a section in the survey that acknowledged study limitations (Buckholder et al., 2020). All ethical compliance rules for researchers were observed and complied with the IRB requirements.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study resides in its potential to contribute to the limited body of knowledge surrounding the once-in-a-generation paradigm shift (Claus, 2021) with companies in the knowledge economy having a higher percentage of knowledge workers adopting a new operating structure, a hybrid workplace model (Wyld, 2022). More specifically, this study helps to narrow the knowledge gap that exists around the effect female leaders transitioning from leading in a traditional in-office environment to a hybrid workplace model by focusing on identifying new barriers and opportunities female leaders might need to navigate and identifying the potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> style as they lead teams of knowledge workers in Toronto. According to researchers Contreras et al. (2020), several million employees transitioned to a new remote workplace model at the pandemic's peak, officially announced on March 11, 2020 (*Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic*, 2020). Very little research exists on the leadership style required for a purely remote or hybrid workplace model, raising the importance of understanding the ideal leadership style, including the potential for e-leadership theory (Contreras et al., 2020) and situational leadership style (Mirčetić & Čudanov, 2021). This study contributes new knowledge on how female leaders can successfully navigate the new future of work in a flexible hybrid workplace model.

### **Significance to Practice**

According to one of North America's largest accounting firms, KPMG, a recent study of 2,003 respondents found that employees do not believe leaders in their organization are prepared for leading in a hybrid workplace (Van Hasselt, 2021). E-

leadership theory falls short when it comes to leading in a hybrid workplace model (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). The research findings of this study provide female leaders with new insights that could help them better understand potential new barriers and opportunities they may be required to navigate as they strive to advance in their careers while leading in a hybrid workplace model. The research also provides organizations with new knowledge that could help them progress with closing the gender gap in the workplace, specifically within the middle to senior leadership positions, while potentially discovering new approaches to increasing employee retention rates. Finally, the study presents new findings that could add to the body of knowledge related to the benefits of the Situational Leadership® style in the context of the hybrid workplace model, potentially helping leaders achieve higher levels of success when transitioning from leading in an in-person operating structure to a hybrid workplace model.

### **Significance to Theory**

Given the new reality of a hybrid workplace model, according to researchers Jackowska and Luring (2021), there is insufficient academic-level literature and research on the topic of the hybrid workplace model and the leadership style necessary for this new operating structure, the hybrid workplace model (Grzegorzcyk et al., 2021). Findings from this study also have the potential to contribute to the body of knowledge currently available on gender equality in the workplace and, more specifically, provide new insights into the barriers and opportunities female leaders may find themselves being required to navigate and offer new knowledge that could help to improve gender equality in the workplace (Alon et al., 2020). This study may also contribute to the body of

knowledge on e-leadership theory and the benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style within the hybrid workplace model, knowledge workers, and female leadership.

### **Significance to Social Change**

From a positive social change perspective, this research study creates new knowledge to help female leaders identify barriers and opportunities when transitioning from a traditional in-office operating environment to a new permanent hybrid workplace model. This research positively contributes to the body of knowledge related to advancing gender equality. The research findings of this study provide female leaders with new insight that could help them better navigate their career growth and offer new knowledge that may help organizations achieve ESG goals (Nicolò et al., 2021) while transitioning to a hybrid workplace model. This study also positively contributes to the body of knowledge related to gender equality in the workplace, e-leadership theory, Situational Leadership® style, and the hybrid workplace model specific to companies in the knowledge economy in Toronto. One critical priority of this study is to conduct research that may positively impact social change.

This chapter included a foundational understanding and explanation of what has led to the new phenomenon: the transition from a traditional in-office workplace environment to a hybrid workplace model, along with the recognition that this flexible operating structure is becoming the new normal and the future of how many companies in the knowledge economy will choose to operate (Vyas, 2022). Chapter 1 defines this study as having a narrowly concentrated focus on the lived experience of female leaders in Toronto, understanding the existence of gender inequality, and recognizing that female

leaders must navigate barriers and opportunities to career growth in a hybrid workplace. This chapter also explains how the study identifies the potential benefits of female leaders adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model (Claus, 2021). Chapter 1 presents the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the two RQs, explores the conceptual framework, explains the nature of the study, highlights key definitions found within the dissertation, presents assumptions, identifies the scope and delimitations, highlights limitations of the study, and discusses the significance of this study.

Chapter 2 includes a comprehensive review and analysis of peer-reviewed literature and reputable studies conducted by industry experts on the essential concepts of the study, including the effect the COVID-19 pandemic had on female leaders, exploring potential barriers and opportunities leaders face, the emerging hybrid workplace model, e-leadership theory, and Situational Leadership® style. Research studies and academic articles reviewed provided knowledge in the context of female leaders transitioning to leading knowledge workers in organizations in Toronto that have permanently adopted a hybrid workplace model.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

A fundamental shift in how, where, and when people work is taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic that has the potential to reshape the future of work. Many high-profile organizations with a large concentration of knowledge workers (Issahaka & Lines, 2020) are transitioning from a traditional in-office operating model to a purely remote model during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown to transitioning to a hybrid workplace model that allows for a high level of flexibility (Yang et al., 2021). The future of the workplace has forever changed; this transformation is recognized by scholars as a paradigm shift, according to researcher Claus (2021), one that some scholars see as the beginning of the fourth industrial revolution. The aim of this study and supporting literature review was to gain a deeper understanding of the potential effect the transition to a hybrid workplace model will potentially have on female leaders and the leadership style that has the potential to help them successfully navigate any potential new barriers or opportunities that could emerge for this new future of work. Chapter 2 contains the literature review and analysis of the most current research on the COVID-19 pandemic's impact and effect on female leaders and gender equality, the emergence of the hybrid workplace model, and the leadership styles that align with this new normal. This literature review is structured to purposefully tell the story of the current situation involving female leaders and organizations facing a disruptive change in where, when, and how people work while identifying potential gaps in knowledge. A significant knowledge gap exists because the pandemic and the transition of leaders adapting to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model is a new phenomenon.

### Literature Search Strategy

The primary sources included in this literature review include peer-reviewed articles from scholarly journals published within the past 5 years. The secondary sources included relevant academic and business books written by seminal theorists and subject matter experts, industry and business-driven studies, reports and presentations, dissertations, government reports and studies, conference literature, and credible websites. The literature search strategy used for identifying the most appropriate and value-based primary and secondary sources was an iterative process involving five comprehensive steps, including the (a) identification of search words, synonyms, and syntax phrases; (b) selection of the most appropriate search engines, databases, and relevant academic journals; (c) recognition of seminal theorists and thought leaders; (e) recognition of industry and business associations publishing relevant reports and studies providing a valuable scholar-practitioner perspective; and (d) identification of relevant government resources. It is essential to state that conducting a comprehensive literature review is an iterative process and often does not follow a linear process.

The first step of the literature review began with the identification of key search words, synonyms, and syntax phrases, which was a process that was refined over time based on insight gathered from the search results and research findings. The literature review began by searching the following keywords and synonyms: *COVID-19; female leaders; gender equality; glass ceiling; glass cliff; environmental, social, and governance (ESG); remote work; working in-office; working from home; working from anywhere; hybrid workplace model; virtual first, remote-first; e-leadership theory, Situational*

*Leadership*<sup>®</sup> style/theory; virtual teams; virtual leadership style; hybrid workforce leaders; flexible work arrangements; operating models; labyrinth of leadership metaphor; employee retention; knowledge workers; future of work; leadership competencies; Black Swan; female executives; and leadership skills. Some of the critical syntax phrases used to search for relevant peer-review articles included *women in the workplace; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business; the leadership style required for a remote workplace; the leadership style required for the hybrid workplace model; the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on female leaders; leading during times of crisis; agile operating structure; barriers and opportunities to leading in a virtual workplace; barriers and opportunities for female leaders; leading in a hybrid workplace; gender gap in the workplace; leadership style and traits required for the future of work; adopting a Situational Leadership*<sup>®</sup> *style; The Great Resignation; future of work is hybrid; future post-pandemic workplace; and leading during change and times of uncertainty.*

The second step related to search engines used in this literature review included the Walden University Library and York University search engines and the Google search engine's Google Scholar within Safari. Databases used to search for literature included the following: ABI/INFORM Collection, EBSCO Business Source Complete, Emerald Insights, Emerald Management, Frontiers, IEEE Xplore, JSTOR, Oxford Academic, ProQuest, PsycINFO, ResearchGate, SAGE Premier, Science Direct, Scopus Review, and Taylor & Francis Online. The primary journals that provided peer-reviewed articles that are most relevant to my study included the Journal of Leadership in

Organizations; Academy of Business Research Journal; Academy of Management Review; Academy of Strategic Management Journal; Advancing Women in Leadership; Corporate Governance; The International Journal of Business in Society; European Journal of Business and Management Research; Frontiers in Psychology; Gender in Management; Gender, Work and Organization; Harvard Business Review; Journal of Business and Psychology; Journal of Business Strategy; Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies; Journal of Human Resource Management; Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies; Management and Organizational Studies; and The Leadership Quarterly.

The literature review search strategy also involved three actions, including (a) the identification of gender equality in the workplace (Dzubinski et al., 2019), (b) exploring the existing and potential barriers and opportunities female leaders must learn to navigate to advance their careers and thrive in the workplace (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020), and (c) understanding the potential affect the COVID-19 pandemic, and transition to a hybrid workplace model (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021) may have on female leaders (Alon et al., 2020). The literature review search explored the future of work and the adoption of flexible workplaces by also exploring the works of Bob Pozen, senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Business (Pozen & Samuel, 2021) and Lynda Gratton, professor at the London Business School, who are both leaders who focus on studying remote workplace, future of work, and the hybrid workplace model. Finally, Dr. Paul Hersey and Dr. Ken Blanchard, who initially began co-developing models and frameworks for applying Situational Leadership® style within the company

called The Center for Leadership Studies<sup>®</sup> offering the Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> Model (*Relevant then, relevant now.*, 2019), and separated ways with Blanchard founding a company now called Blanchard<sup>®</sup> (*Frequently asked questions: Rebrand questions*, 2023) offering the SLII<sup>®</sup> Model (*SLII<sup>®</sup> Training*, 2024).

This literature review includes insights from several thought leaders, accomplished practitioners, and seminal theorists. The fourth step involved identifying industry-driven research, reports, and studies that provide a scholar-practitioner perspective, regularly producing new knowledge on women in leadership and the future of work, including the new phenomenon of adopting a hybrid workplace model. Most notably, this literature review included analyzing data publicly accessible from McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org's annual *Women in the Workplace* studies, Steelcase, Deloitte, and Society of Human Resources Management. The final fifth step involved reviewing government resources from Women and Gender Equality Canada, the Canadian Women's Foundation, and the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub. This literature review involved reviewing and analyzing more than 230 peer-reviewed journal articles and industry-driven studies, with all publication dates within the last 5 years between 2019 and 2024. Given that the vast and unprecedented adoption of a hybrid workplace model at this scale of adoption in the knowledge economy (Wethal et al., 2022) is a new phenomenon, a limited amount of research was available concerning the type of leadership style required for this new operating model.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework explores the lived experience of female leaders transitioning during the COVID-19 pandemic from leading knowledge workers in a traditional, predominately in-office operating structure to leading in a new and highly flexible hybrid workplace model. This conceptual framework acts as a roadmap for conducting a comprehensive literature review. More specifically, the conceptual framework helps to guide the synthesizing of existing knowledge related to understanding existing and any potential new barriers and opportunities female leaders may experience navigating the adoption of a flexible workplace and the benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> style in the context of a hybrid workplace model (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020). This framework includes exploring the concept of gender equality in the workplace, beginning with understanding the various metaphors used to describe the struggle female leaders may experience as they strive to advance their careers into senior leadership positions (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020). It also explores existing and potential barriers and opportunities female leaders may be required to navigate in a future post-COVID-19 hybrid workplace.

The literature review then explores three primary components of the conceptual framework: the emergence of a new flexible operating structure, which is quickly becoming the new normal, and the concept of the (1) *hybrid workplace model* (Wethal et al., 2022). Within this section, the literature review focuses on understanding the role of COVID-19 as a catalyst for adopting a purely remote workplace, followed by a hybrid workplace for many organizations with a high concentration of knowledge workers. This

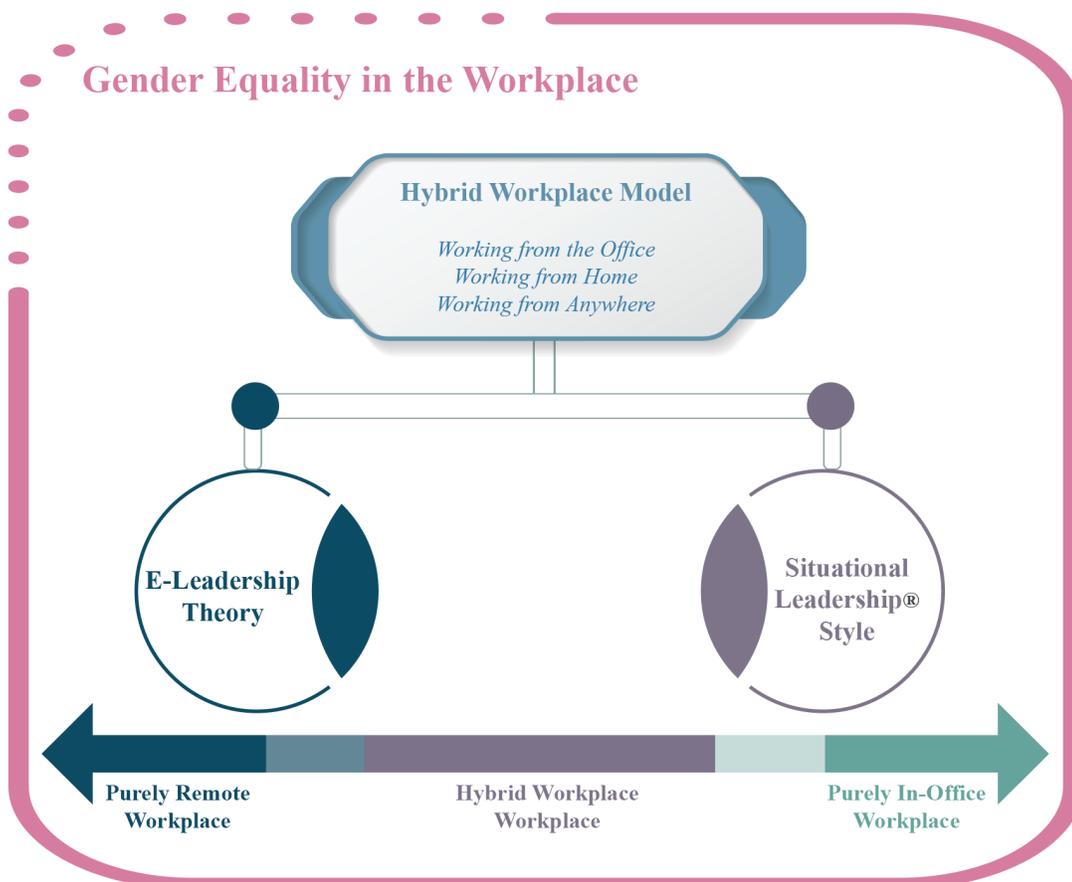
literature review explores the various types of hybrid workplace models that have emerged during the pandemic and are expected to be adopted in a post-pandemic era while also identifying potential barriers and opportunities related to a flexible operating structure.

Finally, the focus of the literature review shifts to understanding the potential leadership style that could align with a hybrid workplace model from a female leader perspective; the focus was on exploring two types of leadership styles, beginning with (2) *e-leadership theory*, focusing on a predominately remote workplace model (Contreras et al., 2020). The focus of the literature review then shifts to exploring the (3) *Situational Leadership*<sup>®</sup> style within the context of the potential for this leadership theory to have the potential ability to gain insights into the skills that may be required for a hybrid workplace model and the potential new barriers and opportunities associated with leading in a hybrid workplace model (Hakim et al., 2021). The literature review is structured to help provide insights valuable to answering my primary RQs, as illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Summary of Conceptual Framework*

**Female Leaders' Lived Experience of Transitioning to Leaders of Knowledge Workers in a Hybrid Workplace Model**



*Note.* The conceptual framework outlines the key metaphors, concepts, and theories that will be explored in this literature review and guide the research study.

## **Gender Equality in the Workplace**

Gender equality in the workplace is a priority ESG goal for many companies across all industries (Romano et al., 2020), and according to Romano et al. (2020), is a crucial priority for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) more explicitly ensuring that female leaders are given equal opportunities to advance to senior leaders positions that provide opportunities for participating in critical decision-making (p. 1). Numerous metaphors exist to explain the gender gap that helps provide an understanding of what contributes to gender inequality in the workplace (Grangeiro et al., 2021a) that provide essential context to this literature review. Progress toward achieving gender equality has been slow; according to the annual Women in the Workplace 2022 study, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced companies to “reimagine the way we work” (Huang et al., 2022, p. 50), which has already begun to demonstrate the potential emergence of new barriers and opportunities that have the potential of effecting how female leaders successfully navigate career advancement and growth. Similarly, researchers Whillans et al. (2021) recognize that the pandemic has created a high level of change and ambiguity while accelerating at an unprecedented pace the future of work, which involves companies that adopt a hybrid workplace model, presenting uncertainty and a gap in knowledge related to understanding the effect this will have on female leaders in the workplace and overall gender equality. Achieving gender equality in the workplace is at the heart of this study while exploring the hybrid workplace model and ideal leadership style for this flexible operating structure.

## Hybrid Workplace Model

With a greater understanding of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic may have on female leaders in the workplace, the next concept explored in this literature review focuses on striving to achieve a greater understanding of the phenomenon of the *hybrid workplace model*, which relates to companies that operate in a flexible structure allowing employees to work from the office, home, and anywhere (Zachariah et al., 2022). Scholars Zachariah et al. (2022) acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of the hybrid workplace model, leading to the reinvention of future workplaces, particularly for knowledge workers (Zachariah et al., 2022). The term *hybrid workplace model* itself is the term most widely used among scholars (Kumar, 2022; Zachariah et al., 2022), followed by the term *hybrid work environment* (Effner & Havriljak, 2022; Verma et al., 2022), and the term *hybrid workers* (Wontorczyk & Rożnowski, 2022; Yawson, 2022). The wide adoption of a hybrid workplace model is a relatively new phenomenon initiated primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Gratton, 2021b) that initially forced companies to adopt a predominately remote workplace.

Many employees have been reluctant to return to the office, pushing companies to permanently adopt a hybrid workplace model or risk losing top talent (Šmite et al., 2023), presenting further evidence that the future of work for many knowledge workers may become a hybrid model (Newbold et al., 2022). Scholars Šmite et al. (2023) speak to the assumption that the future of work will not be the traditional in-office workplace operating structure, and many employees may be given latitude to express how they best wish to work and be productive from where, when, and how work is performed. In a

study conducted in Safat, Kuwait, by Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020), 80% of the participants included employees from three different industries, including “banking and finance, education and training, and oil and gas companies” (p. 916) believed their job could be performed remotely. Furthermore, more than half of the respondents favored adopting a hybrid workplace model (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). Exploring the knowledge of this hybrid workplace model may provide valuable insights concerning the potential barriers and opportunities this new operating model could place on female leaders and insights into the leadership style that may help female leaders thrive in a highly flexible operating structure.

### **E-Leadership Theory and Situational Leadership® Style**

The shift to adopting a hybrid workplace model at this unprecedented pace could leave many leaders uncertain as scholars recognize a lack of a “managerial guidebook” (Wyld, 2022, p. 210) on successfully leading a team in this new flexible operating model. However, the potential does exist to explore the best practices found in industries and professions that have an existing history of working in a flexible operating structure, such as academia, where many professors, particularly those who teach both in-person and online, have decades of experience leading in a hybrid workplace model (Ali, 2023). Scholars de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021) recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic was one of the factors contributing to profound and deep changes in the workplace involving the adoption of a flexible operating structure that has the potential to involve continuous and constant reinvention and, therefore, creating new challenges, barriers, and responsibilities for leaders. According to researchers Ng et al. (2021), the pandemic has created a high

level of ambiguity that many leaders must learn to navigate as they help to lead employees through the adoption of a hybrid workplace model, a new normal, particularly for those organizations with a high concentration of knowledge workers; therefore, placing a focus on the need for a compatible leadership style and related behaviors and strategies.

Whereas academics Tessema et al. (2022) focus on the recognition that the transition to a hybrid workplace model has the potential to place a high level of importance on leaders to not only navigate the transition to a flexible operating model but also to ensure business operations continue during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tessema et al. (2022) identifies the need to manage the potential challenges associated with the adoption of a new operating model on employee retention, acknowledging that the hybrid workplace model has likely been a contributor to employees choosing to quit their jobs in record numbers in organizations unwilling to adopt a flexible operating structure permanently. This research supports that the unprecedented shift to a new flexible workplace model may have many unforeseen effects on how leaders transitioning to a hybrid workplace model lead their followers.

The research on the future of the hybrid workplace and its implications on leaders has several commonalities and contrasting focuses. One common theme shared across all these researchers and scholars is the recognition that the COVID-19 pandemic is responsible for the paradigm shift toward the adoption of a hybrid workplace model, recognition that the hybrid workplace model will be the future of work for many knowledge workers and that a new leadership style and approach will be required as this

new flexible operating structure has the potential to create new barriers and opportunities leaders must navigate (Tessema et al., 2022). One common theme shared among many researchers, scholars, and practitioners is the recognition that the COVID-19 pandemic is responsible for the paradigm shift towards a record number of companies adopting a permanent hybrid workplace model, which they believe will be the future for many knowledge workers having the potential to create new barriers and opportunities that female leaders may be required to navigate in the new future of work (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020). Mavin and Yusupova (2020) find that the pandemic has disrupted female leaders, particularly in the knowledge economy, including academia, where research supports the recognition that the pandemic has “destabilized the progress made towards gender equality” (p. 737) and identifies the need for future research related to understanding the impact COVID-19 has on female leaders in academia and across various private sector industries.

In contrast, very few studies focus specifically on understanding the potential implications or recommendations for the optimal leadership style that needs the unique requirements of a hybrid workplace model either during COVID or in the future post-COVID-19 era for companies operating in the knowledge economy, including the lack of a commonly accepted description of how a typical hybrid workplace model is structured as one-size-does-not-fit-all (Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022). Scholars de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021) warn about the importance of breaking with the past and clearly state the importance of not returning to business as usual. Scholars Ng et al. (2021) also focus on the potential for inequalities in the workplace and, more specifically, the potential impact

adoption of this new flexible hybrid workplace model could have on female leaders' career growth and development, something leaders should be mindful of managing. This recent phenomenon of the wide adoption of the hybrid workplace will require future research on its implications on the ideal leadership style (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020) for the various hybrid workplace models.

During the COVID-19 pandemic government-mandated lockdowns, many companies operating in the knowledge economy initially transitioned to working in a purely remote workplace model (Hacker et al., 2020), forcing many leaders with little to no training and preparation (Mustajab et al., 2020), during a rapidly changing and uncertain environment to quickly adapt their leadership style to leading remotely. Scholars Mustajab et al. (2020) describe the rapid transition to a purely remote workplace as being necessary for the company's very survival and ability to compete at a time when it was illegal for many companies to allow employees to work from the office, forcing many leaders to adapt to e-leadership. When exploring the potentially ideal leadership style for a hybrid workplace model that allows for a balance of working from the office and remotely (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021), it is essential to establish a more robust understanding of *e-leadership theory* (Kulshreshtha & Sharma, 2021) with a focus on working remotely, which could consist of working from home or anywhere that allows for remote access.

In contrast, when looking closer at the mix of leading both in-office and remotely, the primary leadership theory researched in this study is the *Situational Leadership*<sup>®</sup> *style*, a leadership style derived from the Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> theory created by

seminal theorists Hersey and Blanchard that is highly adaptable and well-suited to rapidly changing environments (Hakim et al., 2021) similar to that found in the hybrid workplace model. In a recent study, scholars Mirčetić and Vukotic (2020) recognize Situational Leadership® as an ideal leadership style that allows leaders to adapt and adjust their leadership style while operating in an environment of constant change and uncertainty, with a focus on addressing employees' individual and unique requirements. With the recognition that leadership is complex in a traditional in-office operating environment and even more so in a hybrid workplace model, the Situational Leadership® style offers female leaders a well-established and proven leadership methodology and practical operating models for leading successfully in times of change and chaos (Hakim et al., 2021; Mirčetić & Čudanov, 2021). This conceptual framework and literature review offer a logical structure for conducting research, analyzing data, and interpreting the study results necessary to discover answers to the two primary RQs. In the following section, the literature review provides a comprehensive analysis of existing knowledge pertinent to this study, focusing on gender equality and female leaders, the hybrid workplace model, and the Situational Leadership® style.

## **Literature Review**

### **Gender Equality in the Workplace and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Although the representation of women advancing to senior and executive-level leadership positions has risen gradually, the gender gap in the workplace still exists more explicitly as many companies struggle to achieve gender parity in senior leadership positions with decision-making powers (Bristy et al., 2020). Looking at board positions,

according to researchers Bristy et al. (2020), female leaders occupy, on average, less than 10% of seats on the board of directors, and less than 1% of firms studied by Bristy et al. (2020) have a “female-dominated board” (p. 8); even though the fact that increasing gender diversity is proven to have a “significant positive impact on stock returns” (p. 15). What is striking is that a gender gap still exists at a time when, according to Ammerman and Groyberg (2021), women in the United States, for the first time in history, represent the majority when it comes to holding a college-level education in the workforce, often a prerequisite to career advancement and the gap between women and men in the workforce is at an all-time low. A study conducted annually by McKinsey & Company and Lean In (2021) called “Women in the Workplace” (Thomas et al., 2021, p. 1) provides evidence that women are promoted to management positions at a slower rate than their male counterparts with similar experience and credentials.

When discussing the gender gap in the workplace, scholars and practitioners commonly refer to the gap between female employees and their ability to advance their careers to senior leadership positions (Huang et al., 2022). More specifically, the gap pertains to a lack of women promoted to middle and senior-level positions in the organizational hierarchy where they earn a new title and advance to a position that provides them with the opportunity to lead teams, achieve formal power and not only informal power, and allows them to have a seat at the senior leadership table to contribute to high-level corporate decision-making (Fapohunda, 2018). Gender equality in the workplace remains a problem in many organizations across North America.

Gender equality is a long-standing issue that has become, over the past decade, an increasingly crucial corporate priority within organizations' ESG goals (Cho et al., 2020) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) objectives and strategies (Bristy et al., 2020), mainly as investors of public companies are increasingly more concerned about mitigating risk while being socially conscious and having a positive impact on the world (Cho et al., 2020; Shakil, 2021; Gressel et al., 2020). Many companies have also publicly committed to helping the United Nations (UN) achieve their 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (Ameli et al., 2023), more specifically, "Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (*Sustainable Development Goals*, 2024).

Soares and Sidun (2021) recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the perception of female leaders in the workplace, more specifically gender roles, which has the potential to "undermine leadership opportunities" (p. 131). Despite progress being made toward closing the gender gap at all levels of management since 2016, according to Thomas et al. (2021), women remain underrepresented. When looking at the representation of female leaders holding CEO positions in Fortune 500 companies with "74 female CEOs" (Buchholz, 2022, para. 1), representing only "15% female representation" (Buchholz, 2022, para. 1) holding this senior-level CEO position. Looking at the global gender gap, the World Economic Forum published a report in 2022 that states it will take more than 132 years to close the global gender gap worldwide (*Global gender gap report 2022, insight report*, 2022, p. 5), and another report conducted in 2023 acknowledges the COVID-19 pandemics set-back on "gender parity globally"

(*Global gender gap report 2023, insight report, 2023, p. 4*). Looking specifically at Canada, the Canadian Women's Foundation reported in 2022 that only 35.6% of women in Canada held a management position, only 30.9% held a senior management position, and even fewer held a position on the board of directors, with only 18.3% of women on boards (*The facts about women and leadership in Canada, 2022*). When looking at female leaders in the CEO role in Canada's most prominent companies listed on the stock exchange, in 2021, only 4% were led by women (*The facts about women and leadership in Canada, 2022*), confirming that a gender gap in senior leadership still exists.

When women face barriers that negatively affect their ability to advance in their careers, this has a negative impact not only on gender equality, the lives of individual women, and society but also a negative effect on the global economy (Madgavkar et al., 2020). McKinsey Global Institute stated in a recent study that should gender equality continue to progress, the net increase to the global gross domestic product (GDP) could be as high as \$13 trillion by 2030 (Madgavkar et al., 2020). Female leaders face a higher chance of experiencing issues in the workplace, resulting in higher levels of stress related to issues such as having their level of competency and authority questioned, among other behaviors that lead to the feelings of being marginalized, underappreciated, discriminated, and not included in critical decision-making or restricted access to valuable information, which can lead to feels of burnout and stress (Alon et al., 2020). Given organizations' lack of progress toward achieving gender equality in the workplace, more knowledge and practical, real-world solutions are required to close the gender gap (Grandy et al., 2020).

New evidence is emerging that illustrates how the COVID-19 pandemic may have a significant impact on female leaders to the point of potentially risking a major setback in progress made to close the gender gap in senior leadership positions. Scholars Appelbaum and Emadi-Mahabadi (2022) discovered that many female leaders are faced with the difficult decision of choosing work versus career advancement, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown when children were attending school from home. Evidence is also emerging related to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on women in the workplace in terms of career advancement and increased levels of stress and burnout associated with the increase in unpaid domestic and childcare responsibilities (Feng & Savani, 2020). In addition to an increase of female leaders deciding to drop out of the workforce at a faster pace than their male counterparts (Madgavkar et al., 2020). Recognizing barriers to female leaders' career growth is essential, as well as looking at the present and potential future barriers and opportunities.

When female leaders decide to drop out of the workforce, they risk facing longer-term setbacks in career advancement and, ultimately, their future earning potential. This phenomenon is arguably also contributing to *The Great Resignation*, a term created by scholar Klotz to reflect the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on employees resigning at record numbers and forcing companies to take a closer look at their employee retention and attraction strategies (Tessema et al., 2022). According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, in 2021, 65% of employees surveyed were actively seeking new employment opportunities (*PwC pulse survey*, 2021). Companies that are socially conscious and committed to advancing gender equality in the workplace now have,

because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a heightened awareness of how best to support female leaders. For example, they have become more aware of childcare responsibilities and need a more flexible operating structure (Alon et al., 2020). At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to note that many schools shut down during the lockdown period, resulting in added stress and increased workload associated with having children attend school from home (Feng & Savani, 2020), increasing the level of stress associated with balancing work responsibilities remotely. It is essential to recognize the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on gender equality and continue to study this critical topic to understand how to support female leaders better.

### ***Metaphors for Gender Inequality in the Workplace***

Gender equality in the workplace is essential not only from a social good perspective but also when companies' ability to achieve higher levels of diversity and inclusion; providing opportunities for female leaders to be at the decision-making table in senior leadership positions is also favorable for economic growth, prosperity, and social well-being (Nicolò et al., 2021). Therefore, taking the time to understand some of the barriers female leaders may need to overcome and opportunities they may be given that they can potentially leverage is critical to advancing gender equality in the workplace (Lucia & Padgett, 2021). Gaining a more robust understanding begins with exploring the various metaphors used to depict and enhance the knowledge of the gender gap and providing new insights into potential barriers female leaders could face in the attempt to advance in the organizational hierarchy to middle and senior leadership positions of power and influence (Grangeiro et al., 2021).

Various metaphors also help to depict the female journey leaders experience as they strive to progress in their careers and face inequalities in the workplace both from organizational behavior and individual perspective, along with the struggles associated with remaining their authentic selves when they are promoted to senior leadership positions (Grangeiro et al., 2021). Over the years, as the workplace and society have changed and evolved, so have the metaphors used to describe gender inequality in the workplace. According to a comprehensive and systematic literature review conducted by scholars Grangeiro et al. (2021) involving the analysis of 688 journals and 1,269 papers, the most widely accepted metaphors for gender equality were evaluated and included the following:

Glass ceiling, glass cliff, glass escalator, glass floor, glass walls, velvet ghettos, concrete ceiling, glass doors, tokenism, homosocial reproduction, homophily, old boys' network, backlash effects, queen bee phenomenon, career tournaments, Matilda effect, leaky pipeline, firewall, scissors effect, and the labyrinth of leadership (pp. 1936–1937).

The workplace is a complex network that leaders must learn to successfully navigate with many internal and external factors that can affect gender equality both negatively and positively (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020). Female leaders' ability to advance their careers into middle and senior leadership positions is an everchanging (Soares & Sidun, 2021); thus, it is essential to take the time to reflect on the relevance and adequacy of prominent metaphors and their ability to accurately depict the current situations.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a once-in-a-generation Black Swan event that has had a significant impact on the organization (Wyld, 2022) and, most notably, on female leaders who are disproportionately left to manage the increased responsibilities associated with domestic and childcare duties, while also balancing work during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns (Carli, 2020; Fuller & Qian, 2021). Another metaphor not included within the previous list but worth mentioning is the ‘Motherhood Gap’, also referred to as the ‘Household Gender Gap,’ referencing the unfair division of labor when it comes to caregiving obligations for children primarily being placed on female leaders to this day, despite the progress made with men taking on more responsibility (Clark et al., 2021). According to Menta and Lepinteur (2021), although men have taken on a greater amount of household responsibilities over the years, the gap in unpaid domestic responsibilities still exists, particularly for those who have a larger family size. Gender equality is a critical priority for many organizations and should remain a top priority, particularly during this transition to a new normal that involves increased flexibility in how organizations operate. This literature review focuses on exploring four gender equality metaphors, including the glass ceiling, the glass cliff, the leaky pipeline, and the labyrinth of leadership.

**The Glass Ceiling.** One of the oldest and most well-known metaphors for gender inequality in the workplace, the glass ceiling, was first introduced in 1986 by the well-respected business newspaper, the *Wall Street Journal* (Grangeiro et al., 2021, p. 1524). This metaphor remains to this day one of the most widely used metaphors for depicting female leader’s struggle to climb the corporate ladder, implying that although female

leaders can see a path to the top, the unseen barriers and obstacles along the way often are impenetrable (Grangeiro et al., 2021). The glass ceiling metaphor paints a picture of invisible barriers, making it nearly impossible to break through, and one could imagine that when female leaders succeed in breaking through the glass, it is not without sacrifice and scars (Fapohunda, 2018). The glass ceiling metaphor also implies that career advancement is like climbing a ladder, with each step upward representing a promotion and new opportunities for advancement (Appelbaum & Emadi-Mahabadi, 2022). This metaphor also implies that both men and women are starting at the same place and on the same career journey concerning the starting position, education, and other valuable qualifications, with the exception that at some point along the journey, the ladder woman climb reaches a point where there is an impenetrable glass ceiling preventing further career advancement.

Meanwhile, men can continue to advance to senior leadership positions as they do not face the same career barriers, obstacles, and unconscious biases as female leaders (Jauhar & Lau, 2018). The glass ceiling metaphor explains the significant gender gap in female leaders holding senior leadership positions, those of power and authority (Schultheiss, 2021). Scholar Fapohunda (2018) describes the glass ceiling as a pattern of challenges that negatively affect the advancement of female leaders and the attraction of new female leader employees to an organization due to discrimination against female leaders. The glass ceiling is a well-known and recognized metaphor but is no longer as accurate today, as many women have broken through the glass ceiling.

**The Glass Cliff.** This metaphor speaks to the phenomenon of women being given a promotion to a senior leadership position within a company that is facing a crisis and difficult situation that has the potential to impact the reputation of the leader negatively and has a higher probability of being replaced once the crisis has been rectified, therefore allowing the female leader to take the hit (Grangeiro et al., 2021). Organizations often seek more empathic and caring leaders during a crisis, a stereotype associated with female leaders (Srivastava & Nalawade, 2023). Scholars Reinwald et al. (2022) found in a study focused on understanding the hypothesis that companies have a higher probability of hiring a female leader when companies are in crisis and confirming that there is a significant connection between the promotion or hiring of female leaders during high-risk situations. Interestingly, one rationale Reinwald et al. (2022) provided for hiring female leaders during times of crisis is the desire to signal to investors that the company can change and to illustrate forward-thinking concerning gender equality. The glass cliff as a metaphor is still relevant today, especially given the reality that the COVID-19 pandemic at its peak of the pandemic was a high-risk situation.

**The Leaky Pipeline.** This metaphor speaks to the phenomenon that many women choose to leave the workforce and disrupt their career paths. Several reasons, such as frustrating career growth barriers, unconscious biases, discrimination, and harassment, cause women's decision to leave the workforce. The decision to temporarily leave the workforce and interrupt career progress is also associated with taking maternity leave. Therefore, when it comes time for a company to promote a qualified candidate to a senior leadership position, the number of female prospects is lower, thus reducing the chances

of achieving gender equality in the workplace (Böhmer & Schinnenburg, 2018). The leaky pipeline speaks to the difficulty of promoting female leaders and retaining top-performing female leaders to advance their careers as the number of qualified women to select from declines at each level of the organizational hierarchy (Moak et al., 2020).

Achieving gender equality at the senior leadership level requires retaining and recruiting talented female leaders and the resources necessary to help them develop and advance their careers at every stage of the pipeline, from entry positions, management, senior management, and finally, to executive levels. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has harmed the leaky pipeline (Jablonska, 2021), with women leaving the workforce faster than their male counterparts, thus setting back progress to close the gender gap in the workplace (Huang et al., 2022). This metaphor remains relevant and essential today when looking at the effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on female leaders in the workplace and as the operating structures of the future evolve.

**The Labyrinth of Leadership.** Seminal theorists Carli and Eagly published a book called *Through the Labyrinth* (Eagly & Carli, 2007) in 2007, presenting a new metaphor called the labyrinth of leadership, which they believed more accurately depicts the barriers and enablers or opportunities female leaders experience in their complex journey toward advancing their careers, being promoted into and once promoted succeeding in senior leadership positions. The original metaphor of the impenetrable glass ceiling barrier no longer accurately represents the journey of female leaders experience as they are better able to overcome some barriers and advance their careers and the reasons behind the underrepresentation of female leaders in senior leadership

positions and overall gender equality in the workplace (Grangeiro et al., 2021). The rationale for the metaphor, the labyrinth of leadership, begins with the recognition that a small percentage of women have successfully broken through the glass ceiling, although it remains a small percentage, with only 8.2% of women holding the top position of CEO in Fortune Global 500 companies in 2020 (Connley, 2021; *Women in management (Quick take)*, 2022) indicating barrier to career growth still remain for female leaders.

A labyrinth as a metaphor portrays an understanding of a complex and unique journey to navigate that requires overcoming barriers, taking advantage of new opportunities, and recognizing the potential for dead ends (Samuelson et al., 2019). The labyrinth conveys a journey that is not direct or predictable, unlike that of a corporate ladder, which assumes that everyone, male or female, is starting from the same point and experiencing an identical career advancement journey (Grangeiro et al., 2021). In reality, female leaders often start their career journey at different points and face unique challenges and obstacles they must learn to navigate successfully, including those that are not immediately visible, such as unconscious biases and discrimination (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In comparison to the glass ceiling metaphor, the concept of a labyrinth as a visual encourages individuals and organizations to reflect on their unique labyrinth and the organization itself from the perspective of gaining insight into better understanding the current situation from a gender equality perspective and beginning to identify all the potential barriers and opportunities (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020). The metaphor of the labyrinth can create a visualization of barriers and opportunities that provide leaders with

insights that can support female leaders better in their journey toward achieving career growth and advancement.

### **Potential Barriers and Opportunities for Female Leaders Navigating the Workplace in a Future Post-COVID-19 Workplace**

This section of the literature review provides insight into the existing body of knowledge on the various challenges, including potential barriers female leaders face as they navigate their journey towards positions of senior leadership, along with the various opportunities that act as enablers helping them achieve their career goals and aspirations successfully in a future post-COVID-19 workplace. Although the route to leadership for female leaders exists, the journey is complex and, at times, challenging to navigate (Gabarró Rubio, 2020). The following section provides insights into some challenges female leaders may face when navigating their careers and striving to advance into senior leadership positions. Female leaders may face several challenges or barriers that hinder gender equality in the workplace. Some of the most prominent challenges that female leaders must learn to successfully navigate and overcome to achieve their career growth and leadership development goals include

- A toxic organizational corporate culture (Grangeiro et al., 2021).
- Lack of mentorship, coaching, and champion support (Mate et al., 2018).
- Weak representation of female talent throughout each stage in the pipeline from entry-level to middle management and prospective senior leadership positions (Grangeiro et al., 2021b).

- Limited representation of female leaders in decision-making and positions of power and influence (Dzubinski et al., 2019).
- Lack of serious commitment to advancing gender equality as part of a corporate social good ESG strategy, including allocation of necessary resources (Cho et al., 2020).
- Conscious and unconscious gender bias, discrimination, and stereotyping (Gabarró Rubio, 2020; Grangeiro et al., 2021; Roberts & Brown, 2019).
- Harassment in the workplace (Roberts & Brown, 2019).
- Lack of career advancement training and support systems (Jauhar & Lau, 2018).
- Disproportionate balance non-paid domestic household and family responsibilities (Alon et al., 2020).
- Restrictions on networking and organizational relationships “the old boys club” (Jauhar & Lau, 2018, p. 167).
- Restrictive policies and procedures associated with employee attraction, retention, and promotion (Vyas, 2022, p. 161).
- Discrimination associated with parenthood (Stojmenovska & England, 2021).
- Lack of not only diversity but commitment to ensuring inclusion in leadership (Appelbaum & Emadi-Mahabadi, 2022).

It is essential to identify and understand each of the barriers to make any progress toward overcoming them.

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic having a significant impact on society and the global economy, the pandemic has changed how many female leaders navigate their careers, as they have been disproportionately affected by layoffs, decisions to leave the workforce, and increased demands on non-paid household and childcare responsibilities directly related to the pandemic lockdowns, school, and childcare closures, and working from the home operating model (Affouneh et al., 2022). Referred to as the “motherhood gap” (Clark et al., 2021, p. 1354), women with families were affected the most during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, placing added pressure and making it difficult to achieve a positive work and life balance (Clark et al., 2021). According to Power (2020), globally, women during the pandemic were “responsible for 75% of unpaid care and domestic work in homes and communities every day” (p. 67).

The pandemic has proven to be an added pressure that can potentially affect female leaders' ability to focus on their career development and advancement (Collins et al., 2021). According to Mavin and Yusupova (2020), female leaders face many potentially new barriers to career advancement due to the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has resulted in a further widening of the gender gap in leadership positions, along with overall employment, as more women lost their jobs during the pandemic or had to make the difficult decision to leave the workforce to care for family in comparison to their male counterparts (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020). The disruption to women's careers during the pandemic will likely have long-term ramifications on their potential to achieve career growth and overall earning potential.

The following section explores in more depth the transition many companies, particularly those operating in the knowledge economy, are experiencing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic involving the shift initially in the early stages of the pandemic to a purely virtual workplace, to that of a hybrid workplace model (Kniffin et al., 2021). There is a need for a more robust understanding of the potential effects of adopting a more flexible operating structure on female leaders concerning the potential new barriers and opportunities associated with their career growth and advancement. The following section explores the future of the hybrid workplace in more detail.

### **The Hybrid Workplace Operating Model and the Future of Work**

The commonly held belief by scholars and practitioners alike is that the restrictions governments across North America and internationally placed on companies at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020 was the catalyst for a record-setting number of companies rapidly adopting a new remote operating structure with no time to prepare (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). Ng et al. (2021) describe the COVID-19 pandemic as a “transboundary crisis” (p. 1) disrupting the way people live and work, a crisis event of this magnitude that hasn’t been witnessed in generations, creating a significant amount of change and ambiguity (Ng et al., 2021). Scholars Vyas (2022), Wyld (2022), and de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021) share the belief that the rapid transition to a remote workplace is an unprecedented once-in-a-generation phenomenon and view the rapid transition to remote as a worldwide experiment with a record number of companies all transitioning to a remote operating structure at once with little to no time for prior planning or preparation.

According to de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021), the broad adoption of a more flexible operating structure lays the foundation for a paradigm shift involving a new normal, a revolutionary future post-pandemic flexible workplace operating model such as the hybrid workplace model. Current literature overwhelmingly acknowledged that the rapid transition to a purely remote workplace operating structure is responsible for creating the foundation for the emergence of a paradigm shift (Gilson et al., 2021) and a new mindset toward the wide acceptance of a revolutionary future post-pandemic flexible workplace operating model. Many scholars recognize that a paradigm shift is currently underway that has the potential to drastically change how, where, and when work is performed (Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022).

According to de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021), the transition to a more flexible workplace structure driven by companies' and employees' needs and desires post-pandemic will likely be comparable to the transition during the Industrial Revolution. Scholar Kulik (2022) goes so far as to describe the transition to a new workplace model as being at "the forefront of revolutionary change and organizational reinvention" (p. 2). Many scholars describe the future post-pandemic workplace revolution, transition, and disruption from a traditional operating model predominately consisting of working within an in-office environment to a new, more flexible operational structure as being the "next normal" (Kulik, 2022, p. 2) or the "new normal" (Newbold et al., 2022, p. 1). The new future of work is evolving with the acceleration, normalization, and remodeling of a new normal at the scale of another "Industrial Revolution" (Vyas, 2022, p. 155), and the "future evolution of the workplace" (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021, p. 2297).

Scholars de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021) believe the COVID-19 pandemic has provided the most significant opportunity for change to those companies in the knowledge economy with a high percentage of knowledge workers capable of working from home or anywhere to “re-image, re-improve, and re-invent” (p. 2302) the workplace of the future. Scholars Jackowska and Lauring (2021) acknowledged that this new workplace reality has insufficient research and literature on remote work in comparison to studies focused on conventional in-office operating structures. In a recent study, McCann et al. (2021) from KPMG Law LLP Ireland warned employers of the risk of remaining stagnant and coined the term “the great work-from-home revolution” (p. 5). Many studies are also beginning to be published by well-known international consulting firms such as KPMG that further confirm scholars’ findings that the workplace as we know it is undergoing a revolution (McCann et al., 2021), which may involve a heightened level of flexibility in where, when, and how employees work.

Although remote work existed before the pandemic, what makes this phenomenon a paradigm shift in where and how people work is the extraordinary speed and strong willingness of companies and employees to adopt a new, more flexible operating model permanently (Allen et al., 2022). Scholars Allen et al. (2022) recognize the significant change accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, among other contributing factors, as “The Forth Industrial Revolution” (p. 178). This shift in mindset toward the future of work has resulted in a high level of change and uncertainty (Ng et al., 2021) and the opportunity to re-invent the workplace with a more employee-centric and gender-equality approach (Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020).

In a study conducted by de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021), before the COVID-19 pandemic, “only 3% of the US office market was considered flexible space” (p. 2304). During the COVID-19 pandemic, embracing a remote workplace became essential for business continuity (Ng et al., 2021). A study published by de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021) confirms that immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in March 2020, many companies with a high percentage of knowledge workers were able to transition more than “90% of employees rapidly” (p. 2308) to a remote operating structure. According to surveys conducted on the future of work, “80% of employees would prefer” (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021, p. 2308) to continue working in a remote operating structure following the pandemic. The research shows that future operating models are evolving, which is becoming the new normal for many companies.

The operational structure of the future may have been changed forever due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with employee desires for a more flexible operating structure aligning with the company’s recognition of the opportunities and benefits of re-thinking the future of work (Kniffin et al., 2021). Scholars de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021) explain the importance of recognizing that even future jobs and how employees perform tasks are subject to change as modifications to the operating structure demand new ways of working. Scholars have begun acknowledging a knowledge gap when it comes to an understanding of how the new highly flexible operating structure will affect how leaders lead, communicate, and mentor during this time of unpredictable change and transition to a new normal (Bjursell et al., 2021). The future of work may involve embracing a more

flexible workplace (Choudhury et al., 2022) and may require a new mindset regarding the future operating structure.

Companies and employees have been experiencing constant change and a high level of uncertainty, particularly at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). The pandemic has caused ambiguity during the initial transition toward a purely remote workplace, the transition to a new workplace operating model (Ng et al., 2021), and this change is predicted to affect many areas associated with operating a business, such as operating structure flexibility, job structure and tasks, workplace policies, workspace, collaboration, communication, leadership approach, and how to work itself is organized (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Gratton, 2021a). The level of change to the future of the workplace resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst is so significant that scholar, researcher, and practitioner Wyld (2022) builds a case for classifying the pandemic as a “Black Swan” (p. 9) historical event. A Black Swan, according to Wyld (2022), is a rare event that will likely have wide-spanning and long-lasting effects and is typically a once-in-a-generation occurrence with the power to initiate paradigm shifts, or, as Wyld (2022) states, “the biggest Black Swan event of this century” (p. 9). Khatri et al. (2021) also supports the classification of the COVID-19 pandemic as a Black Swan event that profoundly affected employees and their overall mental health and well-being during this unprecedented workplace disruption. The change companies and employees have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented and may have long-lasting implications.

Most academic studies published at the start of the pandemic share common recognition that employees and leaders within the organization experienced high levels of change and uncertainty due to the sudden closure of office spaces and involuntary transition of knowledge workers working from a traditional predominately in-office operating structure to working from home (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Many scholars, such as Adekoya et al. (2022), Jackowska and Luring (2021), and Tessema et al. (2022), acknowledged insufficient knowledge related to the impact the transition to a more flexible operating model will have on employees and leaders within the companies that are creating a new normal in a future post-pandemic era. Wyld (2022) believes that the change and uncertainty experienced in the workplace involve “the way we work, the way we organize, and the way we manage” (p. 9). Emerging from the literature is the reality that companies and employees will be required to adapt to a new workplace operating model that is more flexible, dynamic, and not based upon any previous models (Zachariah et al., 2022), therefore creating higher levels of uncertainty as the workplace of the future will likely be a true paradigm shift when it comes to the wide adoption of flexible operating models.

At the beginning stage of the transition to an initially purely remote workplace during the initial COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, many companies scrambled to adapt to the new operating model reality from operations, technology, communication, and collaboration perspective, among many other critical factors affected by transitioning away from the traditional in-office, face-to-face environment to a purely remote environment heavily reliant on technology (Marzban et al., 2021). The scope of the

sudden shift to a remote operating model involved “tens of millions” (Wyld, 2022, p. 10) of people transitioning to working from home, creating uncertainty and unprecedented concerns and opportunities for both employees, companies, and leaders within the organization (Wyld, 2022). Wyld (2022) argues that in modern history, the rapid transition to a remote workplace is one of the most challenging and uncertain times since the “massive shift to wartime production in World War II” (p. 10), and no guidebook exists for how to lead during this time creating a level of ambiguity across the organization (Marzban et al., 2021). Scholars Vidhyaa and Ravichandran (2022) describe the change the pandemic has initiated as the rethinking of “the physical space of labor” (p. 292) and acknowledged that what further complicates this transition is the lack of a one-size-fits-all solution (Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022) further contributing to the level of uncertainty experienced during by the company, employees and leaders during this transition period.

When deciding to transition to a hybrid workplace model, this flexible operating structure affects not only the company’s leaders and employees but also other elements of the operations, such as physical office space requirements. According to Verma et al. (2022), this sudden shift to a remote workplace disrupted the foundational mindset that employees are more effective when present in an office space. When deciding to transition to a hybrid workplace model, this flexible operating structure affects not only the company’s leaders and employees but also other elements of the operations, such as physical office space requirements (Beno, 2021). Researcher Beno (2021) discovered that the hybrid workplace model “contributes to positivity, efficiency, and variation of work”

(p. 337), specifically when compared to a workplace environment where the majority of employees work from cubicles. Scholars Marzban et al. (2021) speak about the critical importance of the role of the physical office space as being fundamental to achieving a high level of productivity prior to the pandemic and the mind shift that has now taken place as companies begin to recognize the value and potential benefits associated with employees working remotely from a “human, organizational, and physical environment perspective” (p. 204). What is essential to recognize is the trend of companies taking the opportunity to not only improve upon the existing operating structure of the past but completely restructure and re-design the existing workplace operating structure to meet the needs of employees and the organization (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021).

When looking at the effect of change and uncertainty resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, female employees and leaders may have experienced a heightened level of change and uncertainty in the workplace, particularly during the beginning stage of the pandemic (M. Ng et al., 2021). Several qualitative and quantitative studies published following the official acknowledgment of the global pandemic provide evidence of a potentially unequal effect on women in the workplace as a result of the pandemic restrictions, organizational changes, and increased personal responsibilities such as increased care burn such as childcare during school lockdowns (Power, 2020). When looking at the future of work and the transition to more flexible workplaces, scholars believe in the importance of protecting gender equality and inclusion in embracing a new flexible operating model (Power, 2020). More specifically, when operating in a remote or hybrid workplace model, female employees, particularly ensuring mothers who have to

balance work–life responsibilities during this uncertain time, are given equal career advancement opportunities (Ng et al., 2021). In a recent study, Ng et al. (2021) speak to the evidence mounting that women may have been disproportionately affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and describe the pressures placed on childcare with school and daycare closures, resulting in women having to make the difficult decision to “reduce their work hour or quit work altogether” (pp. 11-12).

Researchers Ng et al. (2021) found that the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated “work-related inequalities” (p. 18) while also predicting the long-term existence and increased reliance on a remote workplace model. Scholars Feng and Savani (2020) discovered that before the COVID-19 pandemic, when self-rating, both men and women were equally rated concerning how they viewed their ability to be productive and enjoy their jobs. Still, following the pandemic during the lockdown, women “reported lower work productivity and job satisfaction than men” (Feng & Savani, 2020, p. 719). These early findings of potential gender inequality support the need for new knowledge to better understand the lived experiences of female leaders who have transitioned from leading in a traditional office to a hybrid workplace model.

The rapid and vast adoption of flexible work-from-home or work-from-anywhere structures, once adopted essentially by knowledge workers based on the need for business continuity during the global pandemic, has forever changed the future of work and is creating a new normal, with the adoption of a new hybrid operating model (Gilson et al., 2021). Scholars Tessema et al. (2022) believe that the perception of how and where work has changed forever because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid transition initially

to a purely virtual workplace, followed by the adoption of a hybrid workplace model that companies who choose not to adapt to this new flexible operating structure will find themselves at a competitive disadvantage. Researchers Adekoya et al. (2022) hold the belief that it was the COVID-19 pandemic that has led to the widely accepted hybrid workplace model that allows for a flexible operating structure involving employees working a combination of remotely from home and in-person in the office, recognizing the importance of adopting a flexible operating structure that benefits both employers and employees mutually.

Many factors must be considered by employers when adopting a hybrid workplace model, including, according to researchers Grzegorzczuk et al. (2021), the potential effect the hybrid model will have on women's ability to participate and advance their careers within the workplace, which poses a challenge given the limited amount of scholarly and industry-driven research as this is a relatively new phenomenon. The hybrid workplace model may present an opportunity for scholars to conduct new research to understand how this operating model will affect gender equality, leadership competencies, and styles. The adoption of a new hybrid model also creates a need to gain further insight into the potential new barriers and opportunities associated with a more flexible operating structure, particularly for those knowledge workers capable of performing work from anywhere.

### ***The Emergence of a Hybrid Workplace Model for Knowledge Workers***

The largely successful adoption of a purely remote workplace at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, with tens of millions of people suddenly transitioning to a

purely remote workplace (Wyld, 2022), was a critical turning point in part due to the strict government regulations, which has resulted in a paradigm shift with both companies and employees having a positive experience associated with a more flexible operating structure and has resulted in an unprecedented number of companies exploring the permanent adoption of a new operating structure. According to scholars Appel-Meulenbroek et al. (2022), many employers struggle to entice employees to return to the office full-time as many prefer a hybrid workplace model. Scholar Halford (2005) was one of the first to coin the term hybrid workspace as early as the 2000s; the term hybrid workplace has become more common and widely adopted following the pandemic lockdown restrictions (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2022). Industry practitioners such as Microsoft are publicly committing to the adoption of a hybrid workplace model; Microsoft recently published in their 2021 Work Trend Index that recognizes as high as “73% of workers want flexible remote work options to continue” (*The next great disruption is hybrid work - Are we ready?*, 2021). Moreover, “66% of business decision-makers are considering redesigning physical spaces to better accommodate hybrid work environments” (*The next great disruption is hybrid work - Are we ready?*, 2021, para. 5). It is becoming clear that the hybrid workplace model may become part of the new normal for many companies with a high percentage of knowledge workers.

Both companies and employees see the value in embracing a hybrid workplace model after experiencing a purely remote workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns (Surma et al., 2021). In addition to the industry trends, scholars are also beginning to recognize the shift to a hybrid workplace model as not a temporary fad but a

permanent new normal with the power to change how companies operate for generations to come, specifically for knowledge workers who can perform their work anywhere. In a literature review conducted by Wyld (2022), the pandemic and the availability of technology designed to support collaboration and successfully adapting to working from home during the pandemic has created an opportunity for companies to shift to a hybrid model that enables employees to work from home, from the office, or anywhere an operating model described as the future of work. Wyld (2022) analyzes 27 prominent companies that have transitioned to a more flexible operating structure, mainly in response to the needs and opportunities emerging from the future post-pandemic environment. Scholar O'Rourke (2021) acknowledged that COVID-19 is a "once-in-a-generation opportunity" (p. 554) to change the way we think of work and believes that companies should consider increasing the level of operational flexibility while also acknowledging that the transition to a hybrid workplace model requires strong leadership.

Many companies, such as Adobe, Amazon, Microsoft, and Spotify, have publicly announced their commitment to permanently adopting a hybrid workplace model (Wyld, 2022). Researcher Kulik (2022) recognizes that working from home is expected to become the new normal, permanently allowing for greater autonomy in the workplace. Kulik (2022) also recognizes the impact the hybrid model has on the hours worked as employees who work remotely modify the traditional nine-to-five schedule to meet their unique requirements and personal schedules, including adjusting to allow for childcare responsibilities. Supporting the recognition that hybrid is the new normal, scholars Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020), in a quantitative study, explored the differences between the

old working conditions pre-pandemic versus the current working conditions in the future post-pandemic. Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020) discovered that the majority of participants surveyed believed they were “more productive than at the workplace” (p. 919), and more than half of study participants favored the permanent adoption of a new hybrid operating structure.

Another interesting finding from the Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020) study was the discovery that participants believed that they could effectively perform “at least 80% of their work” (p. 909) from home or anywhere away from the traditional in-office environment. It is becoming clear that the operating structure of the future for knowledge workers who can perform much of their work from anywhere for many companies may be transitioning to a hybrid workplace model (Semsøy, 2022). Many high-profile companies have publicly committed to this new flexible operating structure, which has created a need for more scholarly research (Semsøy, 2022).

Further supporting and propelling the adoption of a new, more flexible hybrid workplace for the long-term future of work is the emergence of research supporting the reality that a more flexible workplace model does not harm overall performance and productivity. A hybrid workplace model can offer employees an extraordinary ability to balance work and life responsibilities while enhancing productivity (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). Researchers Grzegorzczak et al. (2021) believe that new working processes will emerge and adopting a flexible hybrid operating structure can enhance overall productivity and performance. Scholar Semsøy (2022) recognizes that the hybrid operating model is quickly becoming the new normal; research reveals changes when

working remotely in the “perceived individual productivity” (p. 1) levels that resulted in a more substantial balance of work and life, without harming performance.

Interestingly, Semsøy (2022) discovered that specific tasks were best suited either from working remotely or in-office; for example, tasks that were more complex and required a higher level of collaboration among team members were better suited for being completed in-office. Whereas those tasks requiring “deep concentration” (Semsøy, 2022, p. 57) and limited distractions were best when working remotely (Semsøy, 2022), providing further evidence that the hybrid workplace model of the future is not a one-size-fits-all operating model. Researchers Adekoya et al. (2022) discovered that a flexible workplace and the ability to work remotely led to increases in productivity, more substantial work–life balance, and increased autonomy to work when and where it makes the most sense for the employee to be most productive leading to increases in employee engagement and retention.

In a study exploring the phenomenon of companies rapidly transitioning to working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers Awada et al. (2021) contradict the belief that productivity has increased for all employees while working remotely by discussing how “research shows that productivity decreases with a lack of ability to adjust/personalize workspace” (p. 1173). Researchers Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020) explain in a quantitative study how remote teams that rely heavily on technology to support collaboration and communication benefit from enhanced productivity due to the use of technologies that connect employees who operate from different geographical locations. Further research and analysis into the effect on productivity and performance

will continue to be required as companies transition and adapt to a more permanent hybrid workplace model.

With the dramatic shift to a purely remote workplace, many employees may no longer desire to return to work and instead are leaning towards a more flexible operating structure (Šmite et al., 2023). Employee's desires and interests may play an essential role in driving change to a hybrid workplace model that provides a higher level of flexibility and autonomy; companies unwilling or able to adapt to the newly desired operating structure may experience issues with employee retention and attraction (Vyas, 2022). According to Feintzeig (2020), company perks have changed for many companies that choose not to offer flexibility, including the option of a shorter four-day workweek as a significant perk in their talent attraction strategy.

Researchers Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020) found that employees have changed their expectations of where and when to perform specific tasks. They encourage employers to look towards the future of work, embrace creative and innovative operating structures, and review their policies in light of the new emerging desire to balance working remotely and in-office (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020) while also recognizing the need for future scholarly research. A term for employees' willingness to leave an organization in search of an employer that will allow a higher level of flexibility in terms of operating structure with a mix of working remotely and from home contributed to a new phenomenon called the "Great Resignation" (Tessema et al., 2022, p. 162) by scholar Kloz, which refers to the significant increase in resignations experienced by companies across North America during the pandemic.

According to a study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2021, 65% of employees indicated that they were actively searching for a new job, and 88% of companies were experiencing lower levels of employee retention compared to pre-pandemic numbers (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2022). Researchers Tessema et al. (2022) found that employees during the pandemic grew to value the opportunity to work remotely to the point where those employees are now willing to resign and accept employment somewhere else if their desire for a more flexible workplace, either purely remote or hybrid workplace model are not met. Scholar Kulik (2022) also addresses “The Great Resignation” and explains the importance of ensuring that companies maintain a high level of employee retention, particularly those employees who demonstrated a high level of resilience and ability to adapt and pivot to change during the pandemic as those employees provide the company with a substantial competitive advantage from a human resource perspective. According to the international consulting firm, KPMG companies that cannot provide employees with a flexible operating structure risk losing top talent (McCann et al., 2021). What is becoming clear based on research conducted by scholars and industry professionals is that future knowledge workers may prefer a more flexible operating model, ideally a hybrid model that allows for working remotely and in-office.

### ***Definitions of the Hybrid Workplace Model***

Definitions of the hybrid workplace operating model vary when describing the precise structure of this type of operating model as it means something different to each company. A familiar, well-known, or recognized hybrid operating structure does not exist, given that the hybrid workplace at this scale is new. According to de Lucas Ancillo

et al. (2021), adopting a hybrid model to this scale in the workplace is a new, re-imagined operating structure of the future in a post-pandemic workplace reality. The demand for a hybrid model is strong, with 65% of participants in a qualitative study conducted by Adekoya et al. (2022) stating they have a preference towards adopting a hybrid workplace model, which involves working a mix of in-office, from home, or working from anywhere.

Employees' preference for a more flexible operating model may also indicate their preference for a high level of autonomy in deciding where, when, and how to perform their work (Hacker et al., 2020). According to scholars Hacker et al. (2020), "trust and autonomy" (p. 14) are critical for a successful corporate culture in a hybrid workplace model. It is this desire by employees and companies to have a highly flexible operating model capable of adapting to the changing needs of the employee, company, and market conditions, and other factors such as pandemic restrictions that make it very difficult for the business world to adopt a one-size-fits-all hybrid workplace model. It is becoming clear that a hybrid workplace may mean something different to each organization, with unique approaches informed by individual's specific needs and the ability to be flexible based on the unique requirements of each industry, company, employee, manager, and leader.

The phenomenon involving the breaking away from the traditional workplace structure of the nine-to-five, in-office operating model that has been the norm for centuries, several hybrid workplace models and supporting operating structures are beginning to emerge in a future post-pandemic era that may help inform and inspire the

new, more flexible workplace of the future (Newbold et al., 2022). Increased workplace flexibility and the evolution of the new normal, the hybrid workplace model is not only an operating model now being widely adopted but, more importantly, the adoption of “smart working practices” (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 9), including the focus on being proactive and anticipating the needs of both employers and employees in the future within this operating structure. In a qualitative study conducted by Weideman and Hofmeyr (2020), the term “flexible work arrangement (FWA)” (p. 1) refers to how each employee selects where and when to work that best suits their ability to perform their specific tasks effectively, but interestingly do not refer to term hybrid workplace model in the study. Scholars de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021) recognize the importance of the transition to a new operating model as a paradigm shift and describe the adoption of a hybrid workplace model as the “future evolution of the workplace” (p. 2297) mainly for knowledge workers able to perform their jobs both in-office and remotely from anywhere.

A quantitative study conducted by Smite et al. (2023) defines a set of factors when organizations assess the optimal type of hybrid workplace models, such as managing expectations, type of job roles, corporate culture, and employee preferences. Given that the adoption of a hybrid workplace model on this large scale is a new phenomenon, research is beginning to emerge from academia and the private sector from a practitioner's perspective on the future of work, specifically the future of a hybrid workplace model, from a structural perspective. The types of studies currently available focused on the hybrid workplace are largely comprised primarily of literature reviews and

qualitative studies involving semi-structured and face-to-face interviews. The use of grounded theory, according to Zachariah et al. (2022), is not suitable and is premature at this point, given that the “hybrid workplace model is a novel and emerging concept” (p. 5). One might assume that academics could currently be conducting grounded theory studies. However, given that this type of qualitative research method takes time as it involves a lengthy inductive methodological approach, a limited number of grounded theory studies are currently available on the rapid and broad adoption of the hybrid workplace model following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on a comprehensive literature review, what has become evident is the belief that the future of work is upon us. For those companies relying heavily on knowledge workers, this new reality may involve breaking with the traditional nine-to-five operating model and adopting a flexible operating structure such as the hybrid workplace model. Scholars and practitioners recognize that the hybrid workplace model must be structured to address the individual needs of the employees, the organization, the industry, and the specific activities of each job. Therefore, the consensus among scholars and practitioners is that a one-size-fits-all hybrid workplace model does not exist. Recent peer-reviewed academic and industry-driven studies by well-establishing consulting firms discuss the transition to a hybrid workplace model without clearly defining a specific model and instead offer insights into a flexible framework involving varying levels of employees working in-office, or remotely from home or anywhere (Ferreira et al., 2020; Hacker et al., 2020).

Companies such as Zoom have publicly stated that a single model is not realistic when it comes to a hybrid workplace model and that they are taking a “measured approach to a return to work strategy” (Wyld, 2022, p. 14) because there is not “a one-size-fits-all approach to returning to the office” (Wyld, 2022, p. 14). Looking at the operating structure of the future, according to scholar Kulik (2022), when embracing a hybrid or purely remote workplace, the optimal operating structure is “one that deliberately backs away from formalization” (p. 224). Researchers McCann et al. (2021) also believe in the importance of adopting a flexible operating structure, roles, and responsibilities while also being aware of the individual employee needs; they believe taking a “human-centric approach to redesign the way work gets done” (p. 13), is essential to the successful adopt of a hybrid workplace model. This human-centric approach, however, does not mean that employees can dictate all the rules and structure (McCann et al., 2021).

Scholars de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021) acknowledged that one-size-does-not-fit-all when it comes to creating a hybrid workplace model as the new operating structure for many companies but state the importance of companies transitioning to “re-imagine, re-improve, and re-invent” (p. 2302) as a new way of working for many companies in the knowledge economy. The scholars de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021) believe in the importance of encouraging organizations not to succumb to the temptation to return to business as usual, instead encourage organizations to embrace the transition not only to the operating model but seeing this change as a paradigm shift that will also impact the need to redevelop the physical workspace in terms of the layout and usage, use of

technology, and ultimately challenging the overall “concept of the workplace” (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021, p. 2311). Despite the lack of a single highly structured hybrid workplace model of the future, what is beginning to emerge in both academic and industry publications is an adaptable hybrid workplace model frameworks and step-by-step processes organizations can take to identify the suitable hybrid model to meet their specific needs (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021). The following section presents some of the most widely adopted frameworks and identifies steps many organizations take when transitioning to the permanent adoption of a hybrid workplace model.

**Flexible, Fixed, and Office-First Remote First Hybrid Models.** Many current peer-reviewed studies focus on the rapid transition to remote, followed by adopting a hybrid workplace model and the resulting strengths and weaknesses. Very few studies offer insight into the ideal hybrid workplace operating model during COVID-19 or in the future post-COVID-19 era. What has emerged and been discussed by many scholars is four different types of hybrid workplace models that offer a framework, a tool to help guide organizations when creating a flexible hybrid operating model that best meets their specific needs. The four types of hybrid workplace models, according to Vidhyaa and Ravichandran (2022), are flexible, fixed, office-first, and remote-first (pp. 292–293).

The flexible hybrid work model refers to employees’ ability to decide where and when they prefer to work based on the tasks and priorities they need to perform for the day and where they can best perform them. The fixed hybrid work model involves companies that assign days and specific times when employees are to work remotely or in the office. In the office-first hybrid work model, employees work predominately in-office

as the core operating model and only remotely a few days a week. In the remote-first hybrid work model, employees work away from the office predominately in a remote structure, with the occasional gathering of employees in a traditional office space for essential functions such as activities that require collaboration and team building functions.

While conducting the literature review, I discovered a relatively new term called remote-first or virtual-first. According to Wyld (2022), three companies, including Upwork, Dropbox, and Quora, publicly declared that they had transitioned to a remote-first or also described as a virtual-first hybrid workplace model. Zachariah et al. (2022) also recognized two different types of hybrid workplace models: remote-first and office-first. The four approaches to structuring a hybrid model offer a foundation that allows for greater customization based on the individual needs of employees and employers.

The hybrid workplace model is an increasingly popular phenomenon that is emerging and evolving as companies and their employees strive to identify the right approach that meets the needs of both parties, a win-win solution (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). In a literature review conducted by Vidhyaa and Ravichandran (2022), the scholars explore the hybrid workplace and define this operating model as one that “supports a blend of in-office, remote, and on-the-go workers” (p. 292), supporting the claim that one-size-does-not-fit-all for each company adopting a hybrid model. Scholar Lenka (2021) introduces in her case study the concept of a “unique hybrid work model” (p. 2691) comprised of the concepts of “remote first model; office occasional; and office first, remote allowed models” (pp. 2688-2689). According to Wyld (2022, pp. 11-14),

some of the companies that have used the generic term of the hybrid workplace without defining in more detail the exact operating structure include Adobe, Amazon, Capital One, Facebook, Ford, Google, Hubspot, Microsoft, Nielson, Reddit, Salesforce, Verizon, VMware, and Zillow.

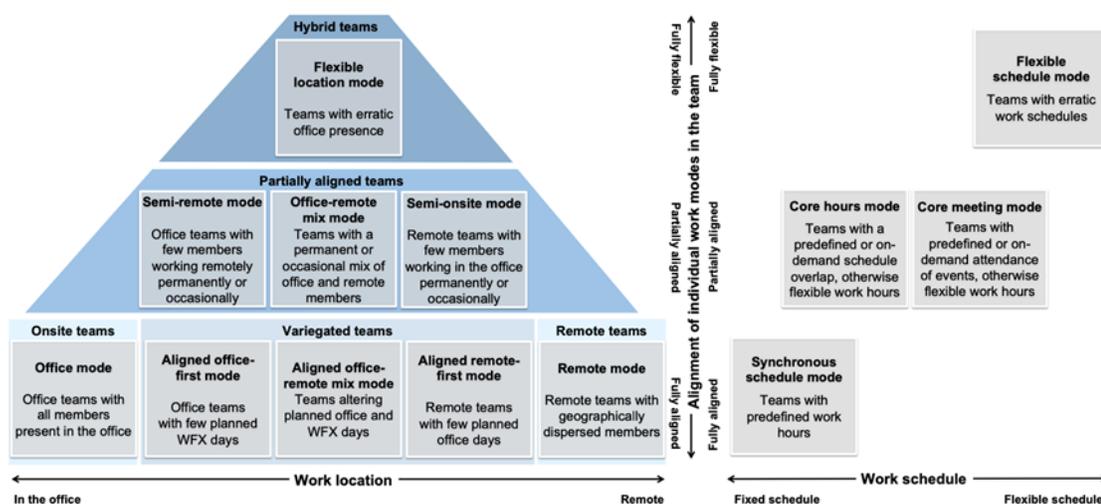
Scholar Lenka (2021) also offers insight into the specific approach some companies within the knowledge economy take as they adapt to a new operating structure during the pandemic and prepare for a new normal flexible operating structure. For example, Lenka (2021) shares that Netflix has adopted a remote-first model and only allows employees to come to the office for team collaboration types of activities and does not allow for “solo working” (p. 2688). Lenka (2021) also explains how the Ford Motor Company has adopted a unique hybrid workplace model for non-manufacturing employees, given that 95% of their knowledge workers voted favorably for a hybrid operating structure. Based on peer-reviewed literature, knowledge workers prefer to work in organizations committed to increased flexibility regarding where, when, and how work is performed.

**The Spectrum of Hybrid Workplace Arrangements.** When it comes to the framework for a hybrid workplace model, many of the models presented in peer-reviewed journals lack a detailed description, given that this complex phenomenon requires each organization to adopt a model that meets its specific and unique requirements. Scholars Smite et al. (2022) offer a more detailed model that sees the hybrid workplace model of the future more as a spectrum of various work arrangements that companies can adopt based on their specific requirements. More specifically, the

spectrum, as illustrated in Figure 3, categorizes work arrangements into hybrid teams, partially aligned teams, and variegated teams. Hybrid teams include a subcategory of flexible location models.

**Figure 3**

*Team Typology and the Spectrum of Work Arrangements*



*Note.* From “The Future Workplace: Characterizing the Spectrum of Hybrid Work Arrangements for Software Teams,” by D. Smite, E. L. Christensen, P. Tell, and D. Russo, 2022, *IEEE Software*, p. 3 (<https://doi.org/10.1109/MS.2022.3230289>). Copyright 2022 by the IEEE Software. Reprinted with permission.

The second category, partially aligned teams, breaks into three optional modes: “semi-remote mode; office-remote mix mode; and semi-onsite mode” (Smite et al., 2022, p. 3). The third category, variegated teams, is broken into five different variations of working on the spectrum that ranges from working solely in the office to solely in a pure remote environment and includes office mode, aligned office-first mode, aligned office-

remote mix mode, aligned remote-first mode; and remote mode” (p. 3). Given that the hybrid workplace model is still evolving, the operational models presented in this literature review only provide insight into the most recent frameworks beginning to emerge in a future post-pandemic era. Interestingly, Smite et al. (2022) suggest organizations refrain from embracing the generic term “hybrid office and hybrid workplace” (Smite et al., 2022, p. 2) as this term is broad and not a well-defined description, thus creating confusion when it comes to an understanding the specific arrangement the organization is adopting. The spectrum of work arrangements also considers the specific work schedules and provides insight into organizations’ decisions when creating their unique hybrid workplace model.

**The Eight-Step Program and Four-Step Process for Creating a Hybrid Model.** Beyond the frameworks for helping to define the hybrid workplace model of the future, several scholars offer organizations a step-by-step program or process to help organizations manage the transition from a traditional nine-to-five operating model to adopting a more flexible structure. Both Wyld (2022) and Gratton (2022) published recommended steps, with Wyld (2022) recommending an eight-step program and Gratton (2022) presenting a four-step process. Looking first at Wyld’s (2022, pp. 15-17) eight-step program, which was created based upon lessons learned from organizations transitioning to a more flexible operating structure because of the pandemic, this eight-step program involves the following:

1. Establish purpose and timing for transitioning to the operating structure.
2. Track progress and make assessments about the transition to remote.

3. Establish policies to help support a flexible operating model.
4. Create the necessary foundational groundwork necessary for success.
5. Formally implement the new operating structure.
6. Be mindful of any potential shifts or changes to organizational culture.
7. Ensure support systems are in place to help leaders and employees.
8. Continuously communicate, support employees, evaluate progress, and make necessary alterations.

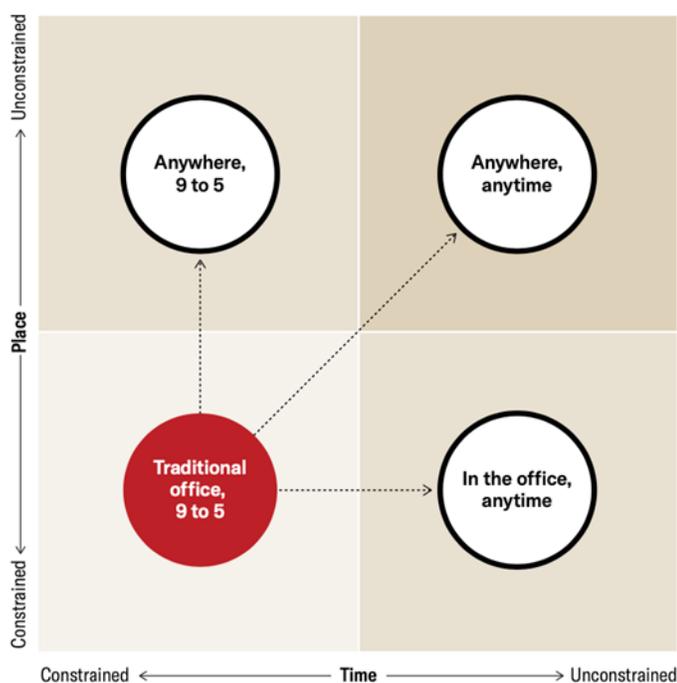
Wyld (2022) generally referenced the remote-first and office-first structure while introducing a concept related to how employees schedule their time, called the “split-week model and week-by-week model” (p. 3). Wyld believed strongly that the transition to a more flexible operating structure affects how to organize work and manage employees, yet surprisingly does not acknowledge the need for a different leadership style based upon the transition to a new operating structure. The eight steps provide a guidebook that provides organizations with a roadmap to help guide many difficult decisions when creating a new operating structure.

Gratton’s (2022) four-step process for designing a more flexible workplace laid out in a book called “Redesigning work, how to transform your organization & make hybrid work for everyone,” and also shared in a Harvard Business Review journal article (Gratton, 2021a) is a process created to help organizations redesign and transform the organization to a hybrid model that works for everyone from the organization, leaders, and employees. The four steps Gratton (2022) described include understanding what matters, reimagining the future, modeling, and testing ideas, and acting and creating new

ways of working. This four-step process builds on the foundational understanding that the hybrid workplace model involves making decisions about how work is arranged based upon two variables, time and place, and looking at multiple dimensions (Gratton, 2021b, p. 6), as demonstrated in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*Work Arrangements in Place and Time*



*Note.* From “How to do Hybrid Right,” by Gratton, 2021a, *Harvard Business Review*, 99(3), p. 6 (<https://hbr.org/2021/05/how-to-do-hybrid-right>). Copyright 2021 by the Harvard Business Review. Reprinted with permission.

Although the model is more simplified than the one presented by Smite et al. (2022), it goes deeper when it comes to explaining a spectrum of working arrangements; this model explains the possible scale of constraints from both time and place while

presenting three potential hybrid structures. The simplicity of this four-step model could be adapted and customized by organizations irrespective of their industry.

**The KPMG Law LLP Ireland Remote Working Platform Model.** The new phenomenon of a record number of companies transitioning to a hybrid workplace model is evolving in real-time as organizations adapt to a new normal. It has encouraged well-known and respected global consulting firms such as KPMG Law LLP Ireland (KPMG) to conduct studies and publish reports designed to guide organizations undergoing an unprecedented shift in their operations. The global consulting firm KPMG offers a valuable and unique perspective on the future of work, given that many of their clients are also transitioning to a new operating model and rely heavily on their professional support and guidance to help them through this shift in operating structures. KPMG thereby has access to firsthand knowledge of what is happening in terms of operating structures and associated effects on the organization at a practical level. In a KPMG study published by McCann et al. (2021), “The building blocks of a hybrid workplace” (p. 9) requires a plan and framework for a suitable hybrid model. Figure 5 shows a high level of detail identifying the critical factors that organizations must take into consideration when redesigning their operational structure, such as human resources, organizational structures, regulatory requirements, digital requirements, and physical location decisions and requirements (McCann et al., 2021).

**Figure 5***The Building Blocks of a Hybrid Workforce*

*Note.* From “The future of work - A playbook for the people, technology and legal considerations for a successful hybrid workforce,” by M. McCann, A. Newton, and R. Franck, 2021, *KPMG Law LLP Ireland*, p. 9

(<https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/ie/pdf/2021/09/ie-kpmg-hybrid-working-playbook.pdf>). Copyright 2021 by the KPMG Law LLP Ireland. Reprinted with permission.

Researchers de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021), similarly to KPMG, believe that another important consideration when creating a hybrid workplace model is the role of “people, processes, and technologies” (p. 2304). The framework created by KPMG offers insight into the complexity of the decision to adopt a hybrid workplace model that leaders must manage effectively to ensure a smooth transition and ongoing success. Returning to the old way of doing business pre-pandemic must be avoided, and adopting a new normal should be embraced to meet the changing needs of the workforce.

According to de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021), the future post-pandemic era provides an opportunity to create an operating model that embraces lessons learned from past mistakes and attempts to create the optimal workplace of the future as the pandemic offers an opportunity to “rethink and transform” (p. 2304) the workplace and transcend to new normal (Zachariah et al., 2022). Shifting to a more flexible operating model is not simply a fad but a long-term transition to a new normal, the future of work; the opportunity exists to re-imagine the workplace and make changes that will not only improve productivity and performance but also improve gender equality and employee engagement (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). Given that organizations are redefining their operating structures with variations in both time and place, along with having to make other necessary adjustments to their organization, including how to lead in this new normal effectively can conclude that this change potentially affects existing and potentially creates new barriers and opportunities that should be identified early in the transition and considered when creating the optimal operating structure.

***Potential Barriers and Opportunities Associated with the Hybrid Workplace Model***

The hybrid workplace model is a phenomenon many scholars, along with industry professionals, are beginning to publish research that identifies the potential new barriers and opportunities this operating model has created from two different perspectives: that of the individual employee and that of the organization itself and their leadership teams experiences leading in this more flexible operating structure (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). What is essential to recognize based on this literature review is that many studies identify new barriers and opportunities associated with the new hybrid workplace model,

which interestingly can, in some circumstances and situations, be either a barrier or an opportunity. In other words, barriers can become opportunities, and those same opportunities can become barriers based on the evolution of the hybrid workplace model and individual's personal experiences and unique situations. What is intriguing is the realization that barriers and opportunities exist on a sliding scale; for example, communication was identified as a barrier by many scholars, while others claimed communication improved as a result of the adoption of new communication technologies introduced when adopting a remote workplace (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Newbold et al., 2022). The same was true for flexibility; several scholars discussed that flexibility is a barrier to individual success and growth in the organization (Grzegorzcyk et al., 2021; Kulik, 2022; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020). While other scholars focus on the benefits and opportunities of a flexible workplace, allowing for a better work–life balance (Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022; Vyas, 2022; Wontorczyk & Roźnowski, 2022).

The following section identifies the most prominent barriers and opportunities discussed by scholars, where some contradictory research discusses in one paper as a barrier while being identified in another study as an opportunity. To summarize my findings based on a literature review, I have categorized the most prominent potential new barriers and opportunities identified by being both barriers and opportunities into three related and interconnected categories: (a) flexibility and productivity, (b) gender equality, and (c) professional development. The following sections provide further insight into literature within these two categories, which all relate to transitioning to a hybrid

workplace model. The following sections provide further insight into literature within these three categories, which all relate to transitioning to a hybrid workplace model.

When transitioning to a hybrid workplace model, what is communicated by many scholars is the importance of customizing an operating structure that works for the specific organization; more specifically, the flexibility of where, when, and how work is performed are at the heart of making a transition to a hybrid workplace model (Grzegorzcyk et al., 2021). According to many scholars, the hybrid workplace model allows organizations to adopt a flexible operating structure that best suits their individual needs, creating opportunities to create a new future in the work (Evans, 2022; Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022). Many peer-reviewed articles recognize increased workplace flexibility as an opportunity and benefit, particularly as many individuals resign from companies that revert to a traditional in-office nine-to-five model (Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020; Wyld, 2022).

According to Vidhyaa and Ravichandran (2022), employees see flexibility in where, when, and how they work as a benefit as this empowers employees to manage their own time around their specific and individual needs (Vyas, 2022), resulting in the opportunity for establishing a better work–life balance (Adekoya et al., 2022; de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Grzegorzcyk et al., 2021). Many scholars have discovered that flexibility in the workplace, which allows employees to work a combination of in-office and remotely, is becoming a critical factor in employees deciding to stay with an existing employer or to leave and accept a new position with an organization that has permanently committed to a hybrid workplace model (Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022; Wontorczyk &

Rożnowski, 2022; Wyld, 2022). Based on scholarly literature, many knowledge workers place high importance on organizations adopting a flexible workplace that meets their specific needs of increased flexibility in where and when work is performed.

Much research points to flexibility in the workplace as the future and optimal operating structure for knowledge workers; contradictory research also recognizes that not all organizations or employees desire a flexible workplace. According to Weideman and Hofmeyr (2020), there is a belief among leaders in the organization that some employees take advantage of the increased freedom and policies associated with a flexible workplace. Scholars Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020) found that the majority of their study respondents felt that they were “less resourceful at home” (p. 919). In contrast to the research that supports increased flexibility in the workplace, researchers de Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021) discovered that organizations choosing to adopt a purely remote workplace model risk losing valuable talent and harming the corporate culture. Flexibility in the workplace operating structure, according to scholars Grzegorzczuk et al. (2021) discovered that flexibility associated with hybrid work has the potential to have a negative effect when it comes to informal interaction between those operating on-site and workers operating remotely.

Despite potential barriers to increased flexibility, the overwhelming majority of articles I reviewed for this literature review acknowledged that the hybrid workplace model may become the future of work and may be preferred by the vast majority of knowledge workers, according to Jackowska and Luring (2021), many employees were not comfortable with the “involuntary distant work situation” (p. 2). In fact, according to

a study published by Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020), the support for adopting a hybrid model was overwhelming; more than half of the respondents supported the transition to a more flexible operating model, more precisely, according to scholar Semsøy (2022) the optimal flexibility level for respondents was only one to two days in-office per week. As the workplace of the future emerges, it will likely become apparent that the new normal for operating models within organizations that rely heavily on knowledge workers will involve flexibility that aligns with employee's specific needs and the requirements of the entire workforce, including those capable of working in a flexible model and those positions that require an in-person presence.

Some of the barriers identified for the individual knowledge workers include loneliness and feelings of professional and social isolation when working remotely (Adekoya et al., 2022; Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Kulik, 2022); blurred boundaries between work and home life resulting in feels of always being on and becoming workaholics (Hacker et al., 2020; Vyas, 2022; Wontorczyk & Roźnowski, 2022); unclear policies, procedures, and guidelines associated with the new flexible operating structure (Vyas, 2022; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020; Zachariah et al., 2022); and Zoom fatigue and technostress associated with stacked meetings on videoconferencing (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021; Semsøy, 2022; Whillans et al., 2021). Several organizations reported facing barriers, including an inadequate technology infrastructure to support a hybrid operating structure (Hacker et al., 2020; Vyas, 2022; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020). Various organizations have also experienced a struggle to encourage employees to return to the office (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021); digital security associated with working remotely

(Grzegorzczak et al., 2021); and the temptation for organizations to return to normal operations in a future post-pandemic without making necessary growth changes (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021).

Other opportunities associated with the hybrid workplace include the ability to allow knowledge workers to achieve better work–life-balance (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022; Vyas, 2022); reduced time, stress, and cost savings commuting (Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020); higher well-being and job satisfaction (Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022); reduction in childcare costs (Adekoya et al., 2022); reduced environmental and noise interruption when working-from-home (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2022; Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020); and lower costs related to living were also found with employees choosing to relocate to more affordable communities (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). Whereas organizations working in a hybrid workplace model benefit from a reduction in office costs, access to a larger pool of talent (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Vyas, 2022; Whillans et al., 2021); and productivity, efficiencies, and automation (Adekoya et al., 2022; Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Wontorczyk & Roźnowski, 2022); and robust business case for enhancement of technology and automation (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Grzegorzczak et al., 2021; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020). It is essential to understand any potential new barriers so that organizations, specifically those potentially affected by them, can create mitigation strategies and approaches.

Gender inequality is not a new phenomenon; female leaders have been struggling to achieve gender equality for centuries, particularly in senior leadership positions before

the COVID-19 pandemic, the radical shift to first a purely remote workplace, and now, for many organizations, the adoption of a hybrid workplace model (Dzubinski et al., 2019). Some of the potential barriers identified from the perspective of individual female leaders related to the effect of transitioning to a hybrid workplace model may have on achieving gender equality in the workplace and professional development, including the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately had a negative effect on work–life balance as females continue to take on a more significant share of non-paid domestic household and other related family responsibilities such as child care and elderly care, particularly during the COVID-19 lockdown (Awada et al., 2021; Carli, 2020; Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). The addition of new and unknown complexities and obstacles for female leaders to learn to adapt to and learn how to successfully navigate their career growth in the hybrid workplace model successfully, also include the ability to establish clear boundaries between work and home when working remotely (Carli, 2020; Whillans et al., 2021; Wontorczyk & Rożnowski, 2022).

Additional barriers include fear of career stagnation when working-from-home which reduces exposure to decision makers, a fear that “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 10) mentality has the perceived ability to stifle opportunities for promotion and career growth as a result of being at a disadvantage to those who more regularly go into the office (Carli, 2020; Erkal et al., 2021; Grzegorzczak et al., 2021); limitations placed on in-person networking and ad hoc opportunities to connect with existing or potential mentors, coaches, and colleagues that could have a positive effect on career growth (Jauhar & Lau, 2018; Mate et al., 2018); and the continued existence of

conscious and unconscious gender bias, discrimination, and stereotyping (Gabarró Rubio, 2020). Given that gender inequality has always been an issue, it is essential to understand the effect the pandemic and the new flexible operating models could have on female leaders' ability to thrive.

Although some potential barriers to this dramatic operational model do exist, on the opposite end of the spectrum, some of the opportunities identified for the individual female leader related to the effect of transitioning to a hybrid workplace model on gender equality and professional development, include the following: although the work–life balance was identified as a potential barrier, the advent of more flexible operating structures also presents an opportunity for female leaders to potentially achieve a better work–life balance by having more autonomy over where, when, and how they work (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021; Wontorczyk & Roźnowski, 2022); greater level of flexibility in terms of where and when they work, along with increased levels of independence has been shown to increase overall motivation (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020) and job satisfaction along with well-being (Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022); the hybrid workplace model allows for “spontaneous conversations” (Kulik, 2022, p. 221) to take place allowing for a more robust network and potential career advancement opportunities, in addition to helping to offset any potential feelings of isolation and loneliness (Kulik, 2022); and the ability to work from anywhere provides opportunities for female leaders to take on roles that would have once required a significant amount of travel and search for new employment opportunities without the location of the office being a limiting factor to career advancement (de Lucas

Ancillo et al., 2021; M. Ng et al., 2021; Vyas, 2022). Understanding the potential opportunities in a more flexible operating structure is essential for female leaders as they strive to advance their careers by leveraging the potential new opportunities that emerge from this new normal for many knowledge workers.

Achieving greater gender equality has long been an essential area of focus for organizations before the pandemic, some of the potential barriers identified from the perspective of organizations related to the effect of transitioning to a hybrid workplace model on gender equality and professional development include the following: the emergence of “The Great Resignation” (Kaplan, 2021, para. 2) which refers to a significant increase in the number of employees choosing to resign as a result of burnout or seeking new opportunities that allow for greater levels of flexibility in how, where, and when they work and even new career journeys resulting in a loss of top talent (Kaplan, 2021; Tessema et al., 2022; Wyld, 2022); and issues with the pipeline of female leaders pre-COVID-19 pandemic who are being positioned for senior leadership positions (Nicolò et al., 2021). Prior to the pandemic scholars Jauhar and Lau (2018) who identified a lack of support and training for career advancement to help female leaders break through the glass ceiling; lack of understanding of the implications the hybrid workplace model could have on organizations ESG strategy and goals (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020) more specifically those related to advancing gender equality in the workplace; the existence of conscious and unconscious gender bias, discrimination, and stereotyping (Carli, 2020; Nicolò et al., 2021); the existence of a bias and inconsistency in some organization’s pertaining to flexible work arrangements and

perception of unfairness when it comes to which employees or roles within an organization have the benefit of having a high level of flexibility of being in the office or working-from-home, or working-from-anywhere (Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020); the risk of the changes, uncertainty, and adoption of a new operating model further exacerbating existing gender equality inequities in the workplace (Vyas, 2022); and recognition of a lack of research available on understanding the effect the hybrid workplace model could have on gender equality (Awada et al., 2021; Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). Focusing on achieving greater gender equality could also have a positive economic and social impact on society.

Several potential opportunities were identified from the perspective of organizations related to the effect transitioning to a hybrid workplace model could have on gender equality and professional development, including the following: the creating of a hybrid workplace model that could provide an opportunity to create a workplace designed for helping to foster increased gender equality in the workplace (Awada et al., 2021; Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020); the opportunity to establish co-working spaces that support collaboration and engagement (Vyas, 2022), while avoiding making past mistakes by simply returning to life as a new normal and continuing habits and behaviors that negatively affect gender equality (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021); rethinking how the use of space helps increase knowledge sharing across the organization (Semsøy, 2022); the potential to identify new leadership skills and competencies necessary for thriving in a hybrid workplace model (Adekoya et al., 2022; Maduka et al., 2018; Zachariah et al., 2022); the ability to create new and purposeful approaches to creating spontaneous

conversations and opportunities for networking, collaborating, coaching, and innovating (Kulik, 2022); and potential to re-invent and re-design how professional development is delivered in a hybrid workplace model of the future that supports lasting transformation (Erkal et al., 2021; M. Ng et al., 2021). Female leaders can leverage the potentially new and existing advantages the new flexible operating structure may provide them as they strive to advance their careers.

The transition to a new operating structure at the pandemic's beginning dramatically impacted many employees and affected how some leaders led those employees during a highly uncertain and turbulent time (Urhan, 2023). What is also becoming more apparent is that as organizations adopt a hybrid workplace model permanently, the skill sets required to lead in this new operating model are very different from those leading teams in a traditional in-office environment (Urhan, 2023). Early in the pandemic, according to researchers, the sudden shift to a purely remote workplace affected not only the employees but also leaders and managers within the organization.

More specifically, how leaders led and managed their teams in a purely remote workplace, including issues related to how coherency of leadership throughout the organization as leaders, particularly at the beginning of the pandemic, struggled to adapt to leading in the new normal and within a constantly changing and uncertain environment (Adekoya et al., 2022). During the transition from predominately in-office to purely remote, trust emerged as one of the essential elements to successfully leading a team from a distance and during times of uncertainty, both from the leader's perspective with

regards to trusting the employees and employees' trust in the leader (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

Given that the workplace is experiencing a change compared to the paradigm shift of the Industrial Revolution, according to Vyas (2022), the Industrial Revolution transformed how people work. The pandemic is being recognized as the catalyst to fundamentally changing how we work the way leaders lead and creating a new normal that is more flexible and individual, as one-size-does-not-fit-all companies, adding a layer of complexity. With many companies in the knowledge economy transitioning to the permeant adoption of a hybrid workplace model, flexible operating structure, what is clear is that more research is required to understand the implications this new, highly flexible operating structure has on future leadership styles. The following section explores how transitioning to a hybrid workplace model potentially affects leaders transitioning themselves as a leader and supporting their teams during the adoption of a more flexible operating structure.

### **Leadership in a Hybrid Workplace Model**

Leadership and the critical role of influential leaders in organizations is a phenomenon that academics have studied for decades using a range of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research methodologies. A knowledge gap exists today concerning the potential impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on leaders of knowledge workers who have experienced the rapid transition first from the adoption of a purely remote workplace during the pandemic lockdowns to transitioning to leading knowledge workers through the adoption of a hybrid workplace model. This is not only

an increasingly important phenomenon but one that is still unfolding (Contreras et al., 2020; Issahaka & Lines, 2020). Many leaders are facing the same challenges, uncertainties, and changes as their employees due to changes resulting from shifts in the operational structures, as they are potentially required to provide their followers with a high level of support, encouragement, reassurance, and a feeling of psychological safety (Ng et al., 2021); without a guidebook and all while learning to adapt to the unknown themselves (Wyld, 2022). According to Caringal-Go et al. (2021), the decisions made by leaders in times of uncertainty and crisis are future magnified with the weight of their decisions and actions having a more significant effect, something that many leaders faced as the pandemic brought with it high levels of uncertainty and complexity (Hu et al., 2020).

Scholars Hu et al. (2020) also acknowledged leaders' critical role in helping employees adapt and transition to the new normal amidst the high levels of organizational change due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The workplace is evolving, and increased flexibility of where, when, and how employees work is changing, creating a "new normal" (Ng & Tung, 2018, p. 198); this change has created a lack of knowledge when it comes to the effects it will have on how leaders lead in remote and hybrid operating structures (Ng & Tung, 2018). In the following section, I explore the research available on two theories. The first theory, e-leadership theory, aligns with the experience of organizations rapidly adapting to a purely remote workplace. The second theory, Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> theory, aligns with the experience of leaders transitioning to a hybrid workplace model. I also explore the competencies and skills desired for leading in

a remote or hybrid workplace model, followed by the potential barriers and opportunities related to leading in a highly flexible operating model that female leaders may experience and could potentially be required to navigate.

### ***E-Leadership Theory***

Working in a remote operating structure is not a new phenomenon; knowledge-based companies with knowledge workers have been operating remotely for decades, particularly those with globally distributed team members located across different geographic locations that require leaders to lead remotely, but never to the magnitude experienced and scale of adoption during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kulik, 2022). The virtual team was first conceptualized in 1992 (Gilson et al., 2021). In 2016, the virtual workplace was recognized “as a new paradigm shift” (Gilson et al., 2021, p. 2), and yet at that time, despite the desire by organizations and employees to embrace a more flexible operating structure, the technology for collaboration was not available to make it a viable option like it is today allowing for telepresence and synchronously making remote working highly desirable (Jackowska & Lauring, 2021). Scholars Maduka et al. (2018) acknowledged the growing adoption of a remote workplace before the COVID-19 pandemic and that remote teams largely failed due to inadequate leadership skills and competencies because remote leadership differs from traditional leadership, resulting in teams not achieving their goals. Scholars Torre and Sarti (2020) state that the term e-leadership or digital leadership rose in popularity in the “early 2000s” (p. 2).

Recognized by many scholars around the world, leaders play an essential role in ensuring the success of adopting a remote operating model as employees look to leaders

for support and guidance when operating remotely, particularly early into the uncertain and unknown transition period (Kozlowski et al., 2021). Scholars Gilson et al. (2021) make the point that virtual teams are still fundamentally teams and that employees must work collaboratively together to achieve a common goal; therefore, what is known about how to lead in a traditional team should be taken into consideration as it also applies to a remote operating structure. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars Newman and Ford (2021) concluded that leaders who have transitioned to a remote workplace should take the time to fully understand the differences between leading in a traditional in-office environment in a purely remote workplace so they can successfully adapt how they lead their followers. According to scholars Turesky et al. (2020), the remote workplace and, more specifically, virtual teams have been on the rise before the global pandemic, requiring leaders to reflect on the differences between leading in a remote environment.

Given that the adoption of the remote and hybrid workplace model has achieved record levels and is recognized as a new phenomenon, the theory of e-leadership is gaining increased attention, with scholars publicly acknowledging the importance of continuing to study this relatively new phenomenon that is young and continuing to evolve, with a “knowledge gap in practical and theoretical view” (Ionela, 2021, p. 97). The studies on e-leadership include various research methodologies and approaches, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, case studies, and many literature reviews. Interestingly, several scholars have recently published studies that use grounded theory as a qualitative research methodology, thus indicating that e-leadership theory is a

relatively new phenomenon evolving with the evolution of a more flexible operating structure and other market influencers.

Several definitions of e-leadership theory exist among scholars, and according to Kulshreshtha and Sharma (2021), e-leadership is now recognized as a credible leadership functional style (p. 1). Scholars Contreras et al. (2020) explain how an e-leader can lead employees to achieve goals and objectives in a remote operating structure (Contreras et al., 2020). Making an important distinction, Contreras et al. (2020) acknowledged that e-leadership is a theory that goes beyond traditional well-established historical leadership styles or theories that largely reflect leaders leading in a traditional in-office environment; this distinction supports the belief by scholars such as Mustajab et al. (2020) that recognize e-leadership as a relatively new and understudied theory (Mustajab et al., 2020). Contreras et al. (2020) go so far as to state that further scholarly research is required to build a “genuine theory of e-leadership” (p. 5). E-leaders, according to Kulshreshtha and Sharma (2021), acknowledged a potential risk associated with e-leaders only interacting with employees in a purely remote environment with no in-person interaction, raising the awareness that e-leadership should not be restricted to only remote work but requires a combination of in-person touch points and interactions to build a strong rapport and to coach employees effectively.

Suppose e-leadership is to be successful, according to Kulshreshtha and Sharma (2021), it must be unidirectional when it comes to communication, meaning employees are encouraged to communicate with leaders at the top, along with leaders communicating with employees establishing two-way unrestricted communication

channels and move away from a more formal hierarchical structure. Based on this literature review, it is evident that a well-structured and consistent definition or framework of e-leadership theory does not exist. Based on the literature review, beyond the vague recognition that an e-leader leads a team in a predominately remote environment, this theory does not provide a deep level of understanding beyond recognizing that traditional leadership theories do not adequately address the reality of leading a team remotely or in a hybrid workplace model thus creating a knowledge gap.

Unlike many other well-established leadership theories and functional styles, e-leadership is a new phenomenon with a knowledge gap, particularly concerning the new future of work that embraces a remote or hybrid workplace model, along with the role and evolution of e-leaders leading in these flexible operating models (Ionela, 2021). Two scholars that have provided more depth into the theory of e-leadership are Torre and Sarti (2020), as they introduce “four different typologies of e-leadership” (p.3) based on their qualitative study. Torre and Sarti’s (2020) four typologies of e-leadership include (a) lack of presence and therefore no influence on decision-making; (b) e-leader in the information and communication technology department; (c) undeclared e-leadership, where leaders are self-directed and informally lead and are driven to innovate; and (d) e-leader and virtual team, which are formally defined e-leaders with a clearly outlined purpose, vision, and high level of influence and support with technological infrastructure. The last type of e-leaders, according to Torre and Sarti (2020), use traditional leadership skills in addition to innovative ones (p. 11).

In a grounded theory study conducted by Norman et al. (2019), researchers explored the importance of building trust as a virtual leader as their research explores the importance of going beyond the recognition that what makes them a different type of leader is only the physical distance, and raises the importance of establishing trust between the leader-follower; and exploring the “social influence process of leadership” (p. 281). In a qualitative case study conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic by Maduka et al. (2018), the researchers address the need for an in-depth exploration of the specific competencies necessary for e-leaders and virtual teams to be successful leaders, recognizing that remote workplaces present unique complications, dimensions, and even limitations. A knowledge gap exists pertaining to e-leadership from the perspective of understanding “issues of leadership style, challenges, culture, training, and development” (Whillans et al., 2021, p. 2). What is clear is that the gap in knowledge related to understanding e-leadership is essential to close, given the reality that leading in a traditional in-office operating structure versus leading in a more flexible hybrid workplace model presents very different barriers and opportunities that leaders must learn how to navigate successfully. Based on this literature review, there is consensus among many scholars that each hybrid workplace model is also unique to the individual organizations, potentially adding further levels of complexity concerning leading in the flexible operating structure.

According to researchers Kozlowski et al. (2021), “without good leadership, virtual teams are very likely to fail” (p. 1), making it critical that more scholars contribute to the existing body of knowledge on e-leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic has created

potential new opportunities for studying and advancing the field of e-leadership.

According to Whillans et al. (2021), the pandemic gave researchers a unique opportunity to study how transitioning to a remote workplace has and could potentially continue to affect knowledge workers in the future. In an experimental, qualitative study conducted by Whillans et al. (2021), the scholars present an excellent “typology of team interaction activities” (p. 2) that include the following: “task interactions (“the what”), process interactions (“the how”), and relationship interactions (“the who”) (Oh & Chua, 2018). This typology also explores according to Whillans et al. (2021) activities associated with interaction such as “individual work, external and outward facing activities, and training and development activities” (Whillans et al., 2021, p. 2) these typologies and task interactions offer insight into how best to structure future studies, including providing ideas for the types of RQs to ask in this qualitative study.

### ***Situational Leadership® Style***

Unlike the e-leadership theory, which is still a relatively new phenomenon that requires further research, according to Mustajab et al. (2020), the Situational Leadership® theory, commonly referred to as the Situational Leadership® style by both academics and practitioners in the field, is a common well-established leadership approach that offers practitioners a highly adaptable and personalized approach to managing and leading (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020). Situational Leadership® style, also unlike e-leadership theory, has the benefit of having well-defined practical models, methodologies, and frameworks that are copyright protected and designed to help leaders learn how to quickly and effectively adopt a situational approach to leading (*Relevant then, relevant*

*now.*, 2019; *Blanchard's 40+ years of history*, 2024). Claus (2021) recognizes the Situational Leadership® style as one of the most well-developed “contingency theories” (p. 163). Where e-leadership theory has several grounded theory studies published within the past 5 years and a higher proportion of qualitative studies, providing further evidence that e-leadership theory is understudied. However, based on my literature review, the contrary is true for the Situational Leadership® style.

In contrast, most of the studies discovered during this literature review that investigated the Situational Leadership® style used quantitative research methodologies, so much so that intentional searches were conducted to identify qualitative studies conducted within the past 5 years to ensure a balanced representation of peer-reviewed research. This section begins with an understanding of the history of Situational Leadership® style, including a description of the model and framework associated with this well-established leadership theory. The literature review then explores the potential benefits the Situational Leadership® style offers leaders transitioning to leading teams in a hybrid workplace model where leaders lead in environments with high levels of uncertainty and constant change operating in a structure with a mix of in-office and remote.

The roots of today's Situational Leadership® style derive from the original “contingent leadership theory” (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020, p. 97) established by Fielder, a theory that centers around three variables that help to assess if a specific situation is positive or negative for a leader, the three variables include “leaders-member relationship; task structure; and position power” (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020, p. 97). At

the heart of the Situational Leadership® style today is the belief that no single leadership style is perfect for every situation or type of follower (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020).

Scholars Hakim et al. (2021) recognize leadership as the ability to successfully “direct and influence” (p. 139) followers as they perform their role in accomplishing organizational goals and objectives while helping followers to reach their full potential (Hakim et al., 2021). According to Mirčetić and Vukotic (2020), the roots of Situational Leadership® theory stem from the recognition that every situation and follower is different; therefore, this requires leaders to adjust and adapt their leadership style to meet followers’ situations and individual needs.

As explained in previous chapters, Dr. Hersey and Dr. Blanchard in the year 1969 co-authored a best-selling book introducing the life-cycle theory of leadership called *Management of Organizational Behavior*, introducing the life-cycle theory of leadership (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020, p. 97), which is “based on 3-D management style theory” (Northouse, 2016, p. 93); a theory that evolved into becoming the first Situational Leadership® Model implemented by the company called The Center for Situational Leadership Studies® (*The history of the Situational Leadership® framework*, 2024, para. 18). Having worked together in The Center for Situational Leadership Studies® for many years, the co-development of the Situational Leadership® Model ended between Hersey and Blanchard, with both continuing to work separately on the evolution of models designed to help leaders adopt a Situational Leadership® style (*Relevant then, relevant now.*, 2019; *Blanchard’s 40+ years of history*, 2024). In 1979, Blanchard started a new company in partnership with his wife Margie Blanchard, which is now called Blanchard®,

launching a modified version of the model for taking a situational approach to leadership that is called the SLII<sup>®</sup> Model, a framework that helps teach “leaders how to lead situationally” (SLII<sup>®</sup>, 2024, para. 3). Hersey continued to evolve the Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> Model under The Center for Situational Leadership Studies<sup>®</sup> (*The history of the Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> framework*, 2024).

At the core of the Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> theory is the belief that the leader has the responsibility to adapt his or her “leadership style to the developmental stage of their subordinates (follower development level)” (Hakim et al., 2021, p. 139). Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> theory does not believe in a single leadership style capable of meeting the specific needs of each follower; in fact, Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> theory evolved from Hersey and Blanchard’s initial work on leadership life cycle theory (Thompson & Glasø, 2018). According to researcher Em (2023), when using a Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> style, leaders take the time to understand the developmental stage of each follower and modify their leadership approach to influence the follower’s actions and overall performance.

Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> style places the sole responsibility on the leader to modify and adapt their leadership behavior and style to meet the specific situation and followers’ everyday experience and dynamics of the task at hand (Em, 2023) and followers’ overall level of Performance Readiness<sup>®</sup> (*Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup>*, 2024). The fundamental belief is that one leadership style is ineffective for every situation (Em, 2023). The Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> theory’s adaptability may allow leaders to meet each unique situation's needs, potentially proving helpful when undergoing change, leading during a crisis, or transitioning to a new operating structure. The original Situational

Leadership® Model was created to provide a framework to help leaders understand the leadership approach they should use based on the follower's Performance Readiness® level, including their knowledge and capability (Aslam et al., 2022; *Situational Leadership®*, 2024) with employees advancing in some situations and potentially regressing in others “in a developmental continuum that measures the relative competence and commitment of followers” (Aslam et al., 2022, p. 2).

The success of both models, created by the founders of the Situational Leadership® theory, Hersey, and Blanchard, is demonstrated by the significant adoption of these models by well-established companies and industries worldwide. According to The Center of Leadership Studies®, “to-date, over 15,000,000 managers around the world have completed one form or another of Situational Leadership® training” (*The history of the Situational Leadership® framework*, 2024, para. 20), “reaching 70% of the Fortune 500” (*Relevant then, relevant now.*, 2019). Blanchard® also has a significant number of companies embracing a situational approach to leadership, with more than 10,000 companies using SLII® (*SLII® Training*, 2024). The SLII® Model for adopting a Situational Leadership® approach is recognized as one of “the world's most widely used leadership training programs” (*The history of the Situational Leadership® framework*, 2024, para. 5).

Both The Center of Leadership Studies® and Blanchard® have recognized the growing need for applying a Situational Leadership® style when operating in a remote or hybrid workplace model and have created specific programs to address the unique needs and challenges leaders face in this type of operating structure. For example, both The

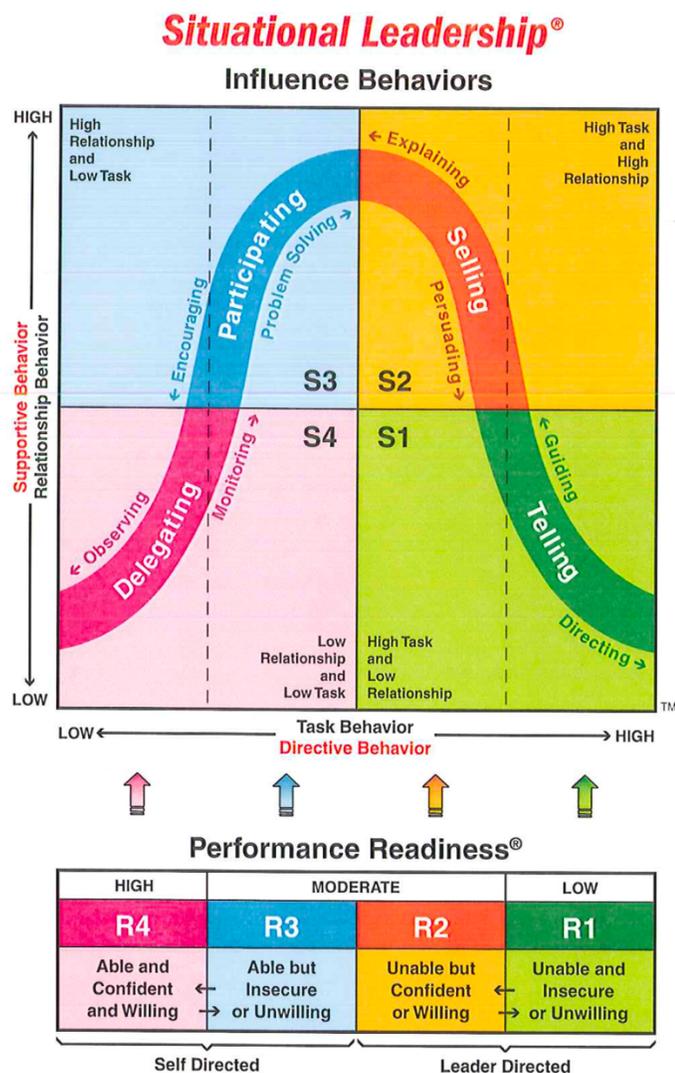
Center of Leadership Studies<sup>®</sup> and Blanchard<sup>®</sup> offer training programs designed in part to help leaders lead situationally while operating remotely or in a hybrid workplace model, including The Center of Leadership Studies<sup>®</sup> programs called Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> Essentials and Situational Performance Ownership<sup>™</sup> and Blanchard's<sup>®</sup> training program called Leading Virtually<sup>™</sup> (*Leading Virtually<sup>™</sup>*, 2024; *Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup>*, 2024), illustrating the importance of recognizing the change in operating structure having the potential to affect the leadership style.

### **The Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> Model by The Center of Leadership Studies<sup>®</sup>.**

Taking a closer look at specific components of the Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> Model, which provides leaders with guidance on the type of leadership style, it is essential to recognize that this model includes four distinctly different leadership styles representing “a combination of task-oriented behaviors and relationship-oriented behaviors” (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020, p. 98). The four distinct Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> attributes, according to Dr. Hersey (1984, pp. 64-65), include the following: (S1) *Telling*, high task/directive behavior, low supportive/relationship behavior; (S2) *Selling*, high task/directive behavior, high supportive/relationship behavior; (S3) *Participating*, low task/directive behavior, high supportive/relationship behavior; and (S4) *Delegating*, low task/directive behavior, low supportive/relationship behavior as illustrated in Figure 6. This model helps leaders continuously evaluate the specific needs of each follower based on their level of competency and level of commitment to complete a task and to determine the most appropriate leadership style, including the degree to which they provide support to the follower and the degree to which leaders direct behavior (Xuecheng & Iqbal, 2022).

**Figure 6**

*Situational Leadership® Model*



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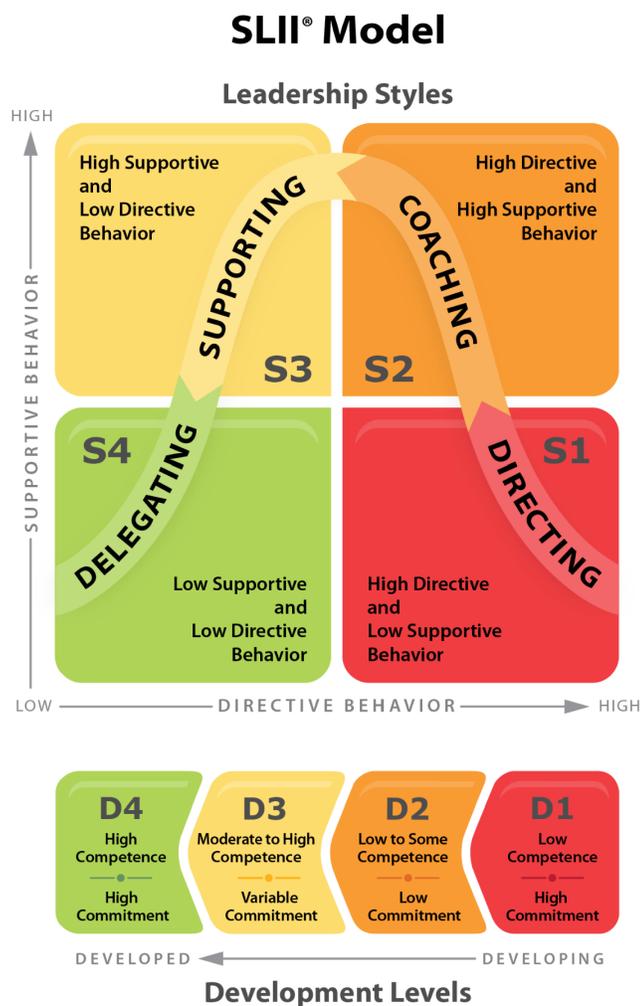
Leaders are responsible for selecting and adapting the most appropriate leadership style for the situation, specifically the right directive and supportive behavior that aligns with each employee's needs, which can change over time and requires constant adaptation (Khan et al., 2023). According to Mirčetić & Vukotic, the Situational Leadership® Model is based on the employee's level of Performance Readiness® pertaining to their level of competence, depth of knowledge, skill set relating to the specific job or task at hand, and the level of attitude towards the role, and commitment to achieving a high level of performance that help leaders assess the most appropriate leadership style of the four to utilize. For example, an employee one day could require one type of leadership style and, the following week, respond better to an entirely different leadership style if the employee is conducting a task they have never performed or if they seem disengaged and unmotivated (Mirčetić & Čudanov, 2021). The four different leadership styles were described by The Center for Situational Leadership Studies® as a model that “provides a repeatable process for matching leadership behaviors to the performance need of those being influenced. Unlike other leadership models, Situational Leadership® recognizes that there is no one-size-fits-all approach, allowing leaders to adapt their behaviors to suit the unique needs of each situation” (*Situational Leadership*®, 2024, para. 2).

**The SLII® Model by Blanchard®.** Blanchard®'s most recent evolution of the framework for leading followers situationally is called the SLII® Model, as illustrated in Figure 7. SLII® was created based on the belief that “leadership is not something you do *to* people. It is something you do *with* people. The SLII® Model takes a situational approach to effective leadership” (Blanchard, K., 2019, para 4). Some of the most visible

changes to the SLII® Model in comparison to the Situational Leadership® Model include the leadership style of “*Telling*,” which is referred to in SLII® as “*Directing*,” the leadership style of “*Selling*,” which is referred to in SLII® as “*Coaching*,” and the leadership style of “*Participating*” is referred to in SLII® as “*Supporting*” (SLII® *Training*, 2024, para. 3). Another noticeable change to the model involves the terminology associated describing employees current situation in terms of experience and motivation, the original Situational Leadership® Model offered by The Center for Leadership Studies® identifies this as “*Performance Readiness*®,” while Blanchard® has changed this to “*Developmental Levels*” (SLII® *Training*, 2024).

**Figure 7**

*The SLII® Model*



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According to Blanchard (2019), each follower is at a different developmental stage based on the specific task they are undertaking; hence, there is a need to lead individuals differently based on their level of development, the task, and the specific situation. There is a recognition in this model that followers have a desire to continuously develop their skills and capabilities, “the belief that people can and want to development, and there is no best leadership style to encourage development” (Blanchard, K., 2019, para. 4). The developmental levels represent the follower’s orientation towards goals and tasks; the four levels include the following: (D1) *Enthusiastic Beginner*, low competence, high commitment; (D2) *Disillusioned Learner*, low to some competence, low commitment; (D3) *Capable, but Cautious, Contributor*, moderate to high competence variable commitment; (D4) *Self-Reliant Achiever*, high competence, high commitment, (SLII® Training, 2024, para. 5). Blanchard®’s SLII Experience™ training program also incorporates the concept of “design theory to allow leaders to quickly understand the approach and help their direct reports succeed” (SLII® Training, 2024, para. 6). The newly revised term “Development Levels” versus “Performance Readiness®” speaks to the recognition that employees can develop levels of competency and increase levels of commitment throughout their careers as they take on new roles and responsibilities.

In a business environment that is experiencing high levels of change and uncertainty, the performance of knowledge workers may be affected by several external factors (Issahaka & Lines, 2020), such as the COVID-19 pandemic, rapid transition to a purely remote workplace during the lockdown (Wontorczyk & Roźnowski, 2022), and the transition to a permanent hybrid workplace model (Zachariah et al., 2022) a journey

experienced for many companies that may require leaders to adapt their leadership style as they navigate the transitions and settle permanently into a more flexible operating structure (Claus, 2021). Interestingly, scholar Em (2023) recognizes that the Situational Leadership® theory is one of the most popular leadership theories despite often being left off the list of “the most popular leadership philosophies” (p. 17). The role of a leader is to advise, direct, and motivate while helping followers advance their development and career goals (Em, 2023).

According to Mirčetić and Čudanov (2021), there is a lack of theoretical or empirical work assessing the potential for further expanding Situational Leadership® theory, thus presenting a knowledge gap (p. 231); the scholars also believe there is evidence that supports the potential additional follower type the “unproductive follower” (Mirčetić & Čudanov, 2021, p. 231). Researchers Medeiros et al. (2022) discovered that “leaders can and do adapt their sensemaking style when needed, aligning more with situational approaches to leadership that emphasize the role of followers and environmental factors” (p. 7). Adopting a Situational Leadership® style to leading allows for personalization and adaptation, meeting employees where they are in their career growth and ensuring they have the specific support they require from their leaders, which will change and evolve throughout their career and help them reach their personal and professional goals (Claus, 2021). This leadership style recognizes that the support followers require may change based on the operating structure in a traditional in-office environment, remote, or hybrid workplace model.

### ***Leadership Skills Necessary for a Hybrid Workplace Model***

The ideal leadership competencies and skills, recognized as learned abilities necessary for successfully executing job-related activities and performance-related capabilities associated with leading individuals and teams, is a topic of study that goes as far back as forming many of the first foundational leadership theories and styles. This section provides insights into some leadership competencies and skills recognized as potentially crucial as leaders navigating the transition to a new normal that embraces a more flexible operating structure, such as the hybrid workplace model and those associated with e-leadership and Situational Leadership® styles. The COVID-19 pandemic is recognized as a catalyst for transforming the operating structure and how leaders lead followers in this new normal that involves changing where, when, and how the workforce performs their roles and responsibilities (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021).

Researcher Claus (2021), who conducted a literature review at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, focused on identifying leadership skills and practices used by leaders during turbulent times when leading in a remote, “distributed workforce” (p. 164) and when striving to be a “resident leader” (p. 165). Claus (2021) discovered leadership skills as fundamental to leaders' success at the height of uncertainty and transformation. The changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic include the following leadership skills for leading during turbulent times: “strategic thinking, uncertainty management, decision-making, change management, reinvention, employee experience, and support” (Claus, 2021, p. 164). Leadership skills for leading in a remote or hybrid workplace where

employees are distributed include: “emotional intelligence and empathy, trust, flexibility, communication, team skills, empowerment, and delegation” (Claus, 2021, pp. 164-165).

Finally, the leadership skills for leading in a remote or hybrid workplace where employees are distributed include: “resilience and self-care” (Claus, 2021, p. 165).

Interestingly, Claus (2021) discovered, based on a literature review that included the review of “14 professional blogs and reports published from March 16 to December 20, 2020” (p. 163), that the most desirable leadership skills fall within the following five different leadership styles: “transformational leadership, resonant leadership, shared leadership, servant leadership, and crisis leadership” (p. 165). After conducting a comprehensive literature review of peer-reviewed articles published during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in 2020 and the following years, 2021-2023 are recognized as a time when organizations began to adopt a hybrid workplace model while searching for leadership skills necessary for successfully leading in a time of crisis, uncertainty, change, and transition to a hybrid environment. Many competencies and skills required to thrive in a hybrid workplace model were identified from this literature review and have been organized into seven major categories: (a) self-awareness and interpersonal; (b) communication; (c) critical thinking and innovating; (d) trust and psychological safety; (e) team building; (f) technology; and (g) adaptability and resilience. Leadership competencies and skills may be an essential area of focus that aligns with the ideal leadership style for leading in a hybrid workplace model.

The following section provides further details into the specific skills found within each of the subsections, beginning with the first category being (a) “self-awareness and

interpersonal competencies and skills,” which include having a high level of *emotional intelligence* (Claus, 2021; Urhan, 2023; Wallace et al., 2021); being capable of being *empathetic* to other’s feelings, situations, and experiences (Caringal-Go et al., 2021; Gilson et al., 2021; Urhan, 2023); having the capability of successfully *self-managing*, particularly during uncertainty and crises (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021; Newbold et al., 2022; Urhan, 2023); demonstrating a high level of *self-motivation* (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Urhan, 2023); having the ability to create an environment of *warmth* and a *sense of belonging* among the team members (Semsøy, 2022; Urhan, 2023; Wallace et al., 2021); and being capable of creating a solid sense of *purpose* and a *clear vision* for moving forward (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Torre & Sarti, 2020).

The second category (b) “communication competencies and skills” involves having *strong verbal and non-verbal communications* capabilities (Kozlowski et al., 2021; Semsøy, 2022; Urhan, 2023); demonstrating strong *interpersonal communication* (Gilson et al., 2021; Kozlowski et al., 2021; Urhan, 2023); having the capability to *communicate expectations clearly* and create a *shared understanding* of the vision, goals, tasks, and direction required (Kozlowski et al., 2021; Maduka et al., 2018; Urhan, 2023); understanding the importance and having the capability of establishing *two-way communication* channels (Urhan, 2023; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020); ability to communicate with a high level of *transparency and visibility* (Caringal-Go et al., 2021; Norman et al., 2019; Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022); and providing *constant feedback*

while always being *accessible* particularly during times of uncertainty or confusion (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Kirkman & Stoverink, 2021; Maduka et al., 2018).

The third category (c) “critical thinking and innovating competencies and skills,” includes the ability to use *sensemaking* in uncertain situations (Gilson et al., 2021; Hacker et al., 2020); effective *problem-solving* during times of uncertainty and crisis (M. Ng et al., 2021; Urhan, 2023; Wallace et al., 2021); and strong *decision-making* capabilities (Maduka et al., 2018) and ability to be *solutions-oriented* (Caringal-Go et al., 2021; Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020).

The fourth category is (d) “trust and psychological safety competencies and skills,” which include successfully *managing relationships* (Caringal-Go et al., 2021; Kulik, 2022; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020); fostering the development of a team by helping to create *social cohesion* among team members (Jackowska & Lauring, 2021; Kozlowski et al., 2021); *establishing new social norms* that align with the more flexible operating model (Gilson et al., 2021; Kozlowski et al., 2021); creating and sustaining the *corporate culture* (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Evans, 2022); vital *socialization and social connection* capabilities (Kozlowski et al., 2021; Kulik, 2022; Maduka et al., 2018); *building trust* within the team and among all critical stakeholders (Dirani et al., 2020; Gilson et al., 2021; Maduka et al., 2018); creating an environment that encourages *knowledge sharing* (Adekoya et al., 2022; Semsøy, 2022); and encouraging the creation of *social bonds* (Adekoya et al., 2022; Kozlowski et al., 2021).

The fifth category is (e) “team building competencies and skills,” which includes creating an environment that encourages and supports *collaboration* (Kozlowski et al., 2021; Semsøy, 2022); building and sustaining a high level of *team cohesion* (Kozlowski et al., 2021; Maduka et al., 2018); and establishment of an *environment that fosters trust* among the team members (Claus, 2021; Kozlowski et al., 2021; Maduka et al., 2018).

The sixth category is (f) “technology competencies and skills,” which includes the technical capability to use a wide range of *technology tools and software* designed to help with knowledge sharing, collaboration, socialization, and communication (Gilson et al., 2021; Ionela, 2021; Kozlowski et al., 2021); ability to effectively *integrate all technologies* into daily operations (Dirani et al., 2020); and recognition of when to use *richer media for communicating* effectively (Gilson et al., 2021).

Finally, the seventh category (g) “adaptability and resilience competencies and skills,” includes *confidently leading followers* during high levels of stress and uncertainty, *creating a sense of normalcy and reassurance* (Urhan, 2023; Vyas, 2022). The seventh category also involves the capability to *make decisions under pressure* (Caringal-Go et al., 2021; Claus, 2021; Kozlowski et al., 2021) and *creating a trial-and-error culture* within the organization (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Mustajab et al., 2020). These leadership skills and competencies have, in many ways, always been important to leaders. Still, during times of uncertainty and change, they may be fundamental in helping transition from leading in a traditional, highly structured, predominately in-office environment to a more flexible one, such as the hybrid workplace model that allows employees to work in-office and remotely.

### ***Barriers and Opportunities Associated with Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model***

Leaders are at the forefront of change and uncertainty. Leaders are responsible for personally adjusting and adapting their leadership style to meet the needs of an ever-changing operating structure and during a time when there is a high level of uncertainty, particularly at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders were required to support strong communication, as it was of great importance to ensuring a solid and practical level of leadership (Bartsch et al., 2020). It is clear the skills and competencies required for leading a hybrid workplace model must be adapted to the new normal as organizations evolve their new flexible operating structure.

Some of the barriers identified from the perspective of individual leaders of knowledge workers transitioning to leading and communicating in a hybrid workplace model include: leaders face barriers with adjusting and adapting their leadership style in an everchanging and unpredictable environment (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Torre & Sarti, 2020); leaders finding it difficult to manage teams remotely due to a lack of visibility particularly during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, in some cases resulting in leaders choosing to micromanage their teams due to a lack of visibility into their teams activities (Semsøy, 2022; Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020); trust has also emerged as a barrier as employees work-from-home and are given more autonomy and flexibility into where, when, and how work is performed requiring leaders to trust more and control less (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021; Kulik, 2022; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020); difficulty associated with communicating effectively and overcoming barriers with remote communication where it is difficult to read body

language and non-verbal communication (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Evans, 2022; Hacker et al., 2020); and challenges with ad hoc knowledge sharing with some employees choosing to operate remotely and others working from the office (Semsøy, 2022). Despite all the potential challenges, each of the barriers identified has the potential to become an opportunity based on specific strategic actions that could be taken.

Some of the opportunities identified for the individual leaders of knowledge workers transitioning to a hybrid workplace model include the following: the ability to achieve a better balance between work and life with the establishment of well-defined work–life boundaries (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021; Hacker et al., 2020; Vyas, 2022). The opportunity for leaders to grow and evolve due to managing high levels of change and uncertainty associated with the pandemic and the transition to a new flexible operating structure (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Kulik, 2022; Zachariah et al., 2022). The establishment of stronger work relationships between leaders and employees as a result of gaining greater insight into the personal lives of one another when conducting videoconferencing meetings and increased empathy during the pandemic led to stronger connections, creating an opportunity to strengthen further the feeling of psychological safety in the workplace (Kulik, 2022; Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022).

The transition to a hybrid workplace model has also, according to researchers Zachariah et al. (2022), placed a strong emphasis on leaders leveraging and further developing the following leadership skills: the ability to innovate and adapt by way of trial and error when it comes to adopting a flexible operating structure; ability to utilize communication and collaboration technologies; capability of empathizing with the

challenges employees face when undergoing change, and adapting to the new operating structure; and ability to identify new ways of successfully engaging with employees and teams. Understanding the leadership skills necessary for a flexible workplace, such as the hybrid workplace model, created opportunities for leaders to develop these specific leadership skills further during the transition to the new operating structure (Zachariah et al., 2022). Identifying the potential opportunities provides valuable insight into how organizations can create strategies for a successful transition to a new operating structure.

From the organization's perspective, some of the potential barriers emerging related to the transition to a hybrid workplace model with respect to leadership and communication include the following: similarly to how some leaders, particularly when organizations during the pandemic transitioned to purely remote, some leaders began to micromanage employees due to a lack of visibility (Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020) some organizations have increased their level of surveillance on employee with the use of technology to ensure employees are working (Kulik, 2022); and some organizations struggle with the creation of new policies, processes, guidelines (Kulik, 2022; Vyas, 2022; Zachariah et al., 2022), and a lack of "managerial guidebooks" (Wyld, 2022, p. 10) that align with the new normal of a widely adopted hybrid workplace as each operating model is unique given that one-size-does-not-fit-all (Hacker et al., 2020; Wyld, 2022).

Organizations are also struggling with understanding the effect that the transition to a hybrid workplace model could have on the corporate culture when employees are less physically interconnected (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Hacker et al., 2020; Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022); both a barrier and opportunity enabler the

implementation of new technology to support collaboration and communication is a challenge organization face in transitioning to a more flexible operating model (Hacker et al., 2020; Newbold et al., 2022; Ng et al., 2021); and new challenges associated with knowledge sharing across the organization (Semsøy, 2022). Given that adopting the hybrid workplace model at this pace adoption is a new phenomenon, it is understandable that research gaps exist and that, over time, many potential barriers will be better understood and overcome.

Some of the opportunities identified from the perspective of organizations transitioning and communicating within a hybrid workplace model include the following: the once-in-a-generation opportunity to “re-imagine, re-improve, and re-invent the workplace” (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021, p. 2302) including according to Wlyd (2022) providing the opportunity innovate and improve the way work is organized and the way employees are lead or managed; significant cost savings associated with the reduction of real estate, employee turnover, technology-driven efficiencies, and increased productivity (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Wontorczyk & Roźnowski, 2022); and given the ability to have employees work from anywhere organizations have the opportunity to attract new talent irrespective of where they are physically located (Vyas, 2022; Wontorczyk & Roźnowski, 2022).

Finally, the opportunity exists to increase employee engagement and retention as more employees desire to work within an organization that offers a high level of flexibility and autonomy when it comes to where, when, and how they perform their jobs (Adekoya et al., 2022; de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021; Vidhyaa & Ravichandran, 2022).

Organizations are vested in understanding the potential new barriers and opportunities they might face when adopting a hybrid workplace model, so they are well-positioned to help their employees succeed as leaders in a new operating model. Researchers Pozen and Samuel (2023) recommended that organizational leaders prepare to transition to a hybrid workplace model by focusing on “function, location, organization, culture, and scheduling (FLOCS) factors” (p. 2).

The goal is to help the organization structure a hybrid workplace model for everyone. Taking a closer look at the function of a hybrid workplace model, according to Pozen and Samuel (2023), function involves understanding how individuals and teams perform the various aspects of their roles and job tasks that require focus and concentration, collaboration, and connection with peers. Location, according to Pozen and Samuel (2023), is the recognition of not only where the office is physically located but also where employees live to assess potential commutes. The organization represents understanding the type of work performed concerning the reliance on teamwork and collaboration, whereas culture explores opportunities for sustaining social bonds when working part-time from the office and part-time in a remote environment, identifying in-person and virtual social activities (Pozen & Kochan, 2022; Pozen & Samuel, 2023).

Finally, scheduling explores strategies for coordinating when individuals and teams work remotely and when they should come together in the office, ensuring schedules are aligned effectively (Pozen & Kochan, 2022; Pozen & Samuel, 2023). Pozen and Samuel (2021) also recognize the need for organizations to shift from measuring productivity based on an “eight-hour workday” (p. 12) and instead “focus on

outcomes, not hours” (p. vii) by measuring the results versus only measuring the inputs. According to Pozen and Kochan (2022), the focus on evaluating productivity solely by measuring the amount of time an employee is in the office or working at their desk; for example, insisting on hours between nine and five is an antiquated measurement tool.

Leaders should instead measure productivity based upon clearly defined goals; this approach helps to prevent micromanagement and increases the level of flexibility by providing the autonomy for employees to not only have a say when it comes to where and when to perform work but also help to determine how to perform work (Pozen & Kochan, 2022). Another essential point Pozen and Kochan (2022) identified is the recognition that leaders must be aware of the potential unfair balance between those employees who can work from anywhere versus those who must remain consistently in-office, onsite, as the potential for feelings of inequality, jealousy, and resentment towards those employees who have the benefit of increased flexibility have the potential to arise. Although there may be several potential obstacles, the hybrid workplace model may allow leaders to rethink how they lead and perform work, potentially bringing the workplace into a new era, a new normal that is more employee-centric and gender inclusive.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This literature review focused on exploring three primary areas, including female leadership and gender equality in the workplace, the structure of the hybrid workplace model, and leadership styles of those leaders leading knowledge workers during times of uncertainty, with each area of focus all within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A

significant amount of research exists on the topic of gender equality in the workplace; however, research related to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to a more flexible hybrid workplace model is only beginning to emerge as this is a phenomenon with a significant knowledge gap. The second focus of the literature review involved understanding the emergence of what many scholars and business practitioners call a “new normal” (Roberts & Brown, 2019, p. 10) in reference to the wide adoption of a hybrid workplace model that involves employees working in a traditional office, and remotely from home, or from anywhere.

The hybrid workplace is emerging as an increasingly popular operating structure, with limited literature describing this flexible operating model and the impact this model might have on the workplace, female leaders, and the organization’s performance. This literature review concluded by exploring two leadership styles that align with a flexible operating structure, such as the new hybrid workplace model, which includes e-leadership theory and Situational Leadership® style; based on the literature review, a knowledge gap exists about understanding the potentially ideal leadership style for a hybrid workplace model. In the next section, Chapter 3 describes the research methodology used for this study, which involved conducting a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology study, explains the research design and rationale, explores the role of the researcher, provides insight into the research methodology, and identifies potential trustworthiness issues.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

This qualitative hermeneutics phenomenology study explores and describes the lived experiences of female leaders in Toronto, leading knowledge workers transitioning from leading in a traditional in-office workplace environment to leading in a hybrid workplace model. The study identifies new barriers and opportunities female leaders may need to navigate as they advance their careers and achieve gender equality in the workplace and identifies the potential benefits associated with the adoption of a Situational Leadership® style for female leaders leading in a hybrid workplace model (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020; Lucia & Padgett, 2021; Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020). The data collected from this study can contribute to positive social change as the new knowledge created from this research could help female leaders advance their career development goals while leading in a hybrid workplace model and potentially positively impact ESG gender equality goals in the workplace.

This study also contributes to the body of knowledge related to the benefits of the Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model. This chapter explains the research methodology used in this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology study, beginning with describing my role as a researcher and then providing a rationale and description of my research methodology, which involves explaining the participant's selection strategy. This chapter identifies the specific data collection instruments, the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, the description of my data analysis plan. It concludes with an explanation of how the study meets a high level of trustworthiness.

## Research Design and Rationale

The nature of this research study design is qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology. This study was designed to explore the lived experiences of female leaders, leading knowledge workers who have transitioned to permanently leading a workforce in a hybrid workplace, guided by the following overarching RQs:

RQ1: What are female leaders' lived experiences with identifying new barriers and opportunities they must navigate when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada, to adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

RQ2: What are the benefits of female leaders adopting a Situational Leadership® style when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada, while adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

The central concepts I explored in this study included the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on the transition to a hybrid workplace model and, more specifically, the perspective of female leaders of knowledge workers in Toronto. This study also looked at the research from the perspective of achieving gender equality in the workplace. It focused on understanding the leadership style required for the hybrid workplace model, more precisely, by exploring the potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style in a flexible operating model. Researcher Husserl originally founded a phenomenological inquiry as a research methodology designed to gain greater understanding, textual descriptions, and academic rigor to identify and describe each

study participant's specific human experience, exploring their perceptions and the content of their consciousness (Smith et al., 2009).

Furthermore, Husserl believed in reflexivity when conducting a phenomenological study. Each researcher uses a phenomenological research design when making sense of the data while conducting analysis and is naturally influenced to some extent by their own experiences, perceptions, and biases because they are human (Smith et al., 2009). Qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology studies are an evolved version of "classical phenomenology" (Geniusas & Fairfield, 2020, p. 3). Being phenomenological requires that, as researchers, we "disengage from the activity and tend to the taken-for-granted experience of it" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13). The practice of bracketing is also used by researchers using phenomenology as the research inquiry methodology to reduce potential biases (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13), which was also used in this study.

Compared to other variations of phenomenology, one of the primary distinguishing factors of hermeneutic phenomenology involved being interpretative versus solely descriptive, which allowed me as the researcher to interpret meaning when conducting a thematic data analysis that was unconsciously influenced by my own unique and individual human experiences, relying on my intuition to derive meaning from the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). A hermeneutic phenomenology study begins with the collection of data from participants. When it comes time to interpret the data using a thematic analysis approach, the researcher makes sense of the data using intuition and interprets the meaning verse purely relying on the verbatim transcript of the

interview; in other words, it is left to the researcher to interpret, develop, and assign meaning to a participant's lived experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2008a, 2022b).

I identified new barriers and opportunities female leaders face and discovered potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style during this transition to a new normal concerning operating in a highly flexible operating structure where leaders must lead knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model. A hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry method was appropriate for this study as the primary RQs focused on understanding the lived experiences of female leaders who transitioned to leading in a hybrid workplace model with the COVID-19 pandemic being the catalyst for change in operating structure. Although Glaser and Strauss created the grounded theory, scholars recognize this methodology as “one of the first formally identified methods for qualitative research” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 43). As a researcher, I embraced the interpretative nature of hermeneutic phenomenology, a research approach applied throughout every stage of this study.

For this study, the hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry method allowed me to gather a significant amount of deep and rich data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with female leaders whose companies are committed to a hybrid workplace model and have an office location in Toronto. The data collected was necessary for discovering the answer to the two primary RQs, capturing data from the participant's shared experiences. The hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry allowed me to understand the lived experience while also providing me with the ability to make sense of and interpret the data in a manner that led to a greater level of understanding from the

perspective of how to support female leaders in this hybrid workplace model as they strive to lead knowledge workers and successfully advance in their careers. Given that this study explored an increasingly essential and relevant phenomenon, it made sense to begin with a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry approach first, with the potential to conduct a follow-up study using the grounded theory that could result in the creation of a new leadership theory for those leading in a hybrid workplace model (Smith et al., 2009).

At this time, a quantitative study approach was inappropriate for answering the RQs as this study seeks a greater depth of understanding in a smaller sample size. Quantitative studies often require a large sample size (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001) and do not offer insight into the lived experience. In contrast, quantitative studies address RQs from a statistical perspective and use a larger sample size field (Buckholder et al., 2020). Conducting a hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me, as the researcher, to understand the barriers and opportunities many female leaders must navigate and discover the potential benefits associated with adopting a Situational Leadership® style when operating in a hybrid workplace model in a company that has an office in Toronto.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the qualitative researcher, I conducted research, analyzed data, and wrote the findings of this study, all from the perspective of an active participant-observer conducting interviews and was a reflective researcher, which is particularly important given that the research methodology is qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. This research method required me as the researcher to interpret the participant's shared lived experiences (Iacono et al., 2009); taking a dual role involved conducting

one-on-one, in-depth, and open-ended interviews with qualified participants who met the specific participant criteria (Smith et al., 2009). As a researcher, I established a level of trust with each participant by taking the necessary steps to ensure a safe space was created where participants felt comfortable sharing their in-depth personal and professional experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). As a researcher in the study, it was essential to actively build trust with the participants and establish an engaging interview where participants feel comfortable sharing their in-depth personal and professional experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

In addition to being a researcher, I was also an observer, where it was essential to intentionally set aside my own opinions, thoughts, and beliefs when listening to the participant's responses to questions and actively listen to the participants while also observing participants, collecting data, coding data, and reflectively interpreting data I was discovering answers to the primary RQs. During the interview, I asked participants follow-up questions to understand better their unique and individual lived experiences when possible. I applied a bracketing strategy that involved identifying before conducting this study areas where I may have life experiences and perceptions of the given phenomenon that could have the potential to alter my analysis of the research data gathered in this study (Smith et al., 2009). My interview protocol helped me to follow a standard approach to recruiting participants, conducting the interview, and following up post-interview with participants. Before conducting interviews, I rehearsed each interview question, and immediately following each interview, I wrote detailed notes in a reflective journal.

As a researcher, it was vital to maintain my self-disciplined and ethical core values. When conducting one-on-one interviews with participants, I was professional and took the time necessary to create a comfortable environment for participants. Each participant was reassured that their interview would be confidential and that all data collected was password protected, and participants were allowed to review their interview transcripts as part of the member-checking strategy to ensure a high level of accuracy (Buckholder et al., 2020). It was vital to ensure I did not have any professional or personal relationship with the participants, nor were there any relationships with participants that involved positions of power.

Initial participants were selected using a purposeful sampling strategy, which involved identifying and formally inviting prospective study participants, followed by seeking potential participants using the snowball sampling strategy, which involved asking each study participant for referrals of other prospective participants following the interview. When conducting the one-on-one interviews with qualified participants, Zoom teleconferencing software and GarageBand as backup voice recording software were used to record the audio of each interview. Microsoft OneNote was used to conduct interview audits and observational notes. Microsoft Outlook and Calendly were used as online interview scheduling tools, and Scribie.com was used as a transcription service. Following the interview, participants were allowed to share any secondary data, such as documents, images, and other valuable information that they believed was pertinent to my understanding of their lived experience.

From a personal experience perspective, what helped to prepare me for conducting this study first involved research that I had conducted over the past 6 years outside of an academic setting, which focused on understanding gender equality in the workplace and gaining insight into why companies struggle to close the gender gap in senior leadership positions in companies in Toronto.

## Methodology

For this qualitative study, I used hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry methodology. Using this qualitative research methodology, I sought to explore the lived experiences to interpret and gain insight into the participants' life experiences and unique realities (see Dibley et al., 2020). At the core of phenomenology is the belief that “multiple realities exist, and that groups or communities share in these realities” (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 6) and by understanding the realities of participant's lived experiences, this research method makes it possible to establish a deeper understanding and meaning in each of the participants lived experiences (Dibley et al., 2020).

Hermeneutic phenomenology recognizes that a “golden thread” (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 31) exists with each study participant, meaning people are influenced by their “past, present, and future experiences” (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 31). The complexity of the relationship between the study participant and the researcher is also essential in hermeneutic phenomenology, given that the researcher also has lived experiences that influence their perspective and how they interpret data (Geniusas & Fairfield, 2020). According to Dibley et al. (2020), the connection between the researcher and the research itself starts at the very beginning of a study with the formation of the RQs, conducting the literature review, and continues throughout the study during the data collection and analysis (Dibley et al., 2020); therefore, the researcher must from the start of the study document any potential biases or pre-existing perspectives or assumptions that has the potential to influence the study.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study is not focused on understanding the meaning behind the study participant's experiences to gain insight into a narrow and specific experience and not attempting to "prove or disprove anything" (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 56); there is not a single answer, but instead a collection of human experiences that share similarities and differences between the study participants (Dibley et al., 2020) that were randomly selected. The act of pre-understanding (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 95) was conducted at the beginning of my study to document in a research journal my initial preconceptions, perceptions, and related experiences that could influence my ability to gather and analyze the data collected. When collecting the data, all interviews involved a one-on-one, in-depth interview with open-ended semi-structured questions that allowed me to gather insights into the participant's lived experiences and engage in meaningful conversations. The interviews were interpretive, and the data gathered made it possible to "co-create the findings with a fusion of ideas" (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 96). When it came to data interpretation, it was an "interpretive process" (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 116) that involved the interpretation of "human meaning and experience" (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 117), derived from coding the verbatim transcripts along with notes associated with the participant's emotions or other notable impressions of every study participant, using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022b).

Finally, the thematic analysis used in this study involved the establishment of emerging themes through a "reflexive process" (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 127), which involved uncovering shared meanings and experiences. Finally, study findings were written in response to this study's two primary RQs derived from "common patterns,

themes, and ideas” (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 159) generated during the study analysis stage, which was an “interpretive process” (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 159). This method allowed me, as the researcher, to gain insight and understanding into the shared common lived experience of female leaders leading in a hybrid workplace model. This section provides information on the participant sampling strategy, details concerning instruments used to gather and analyze research data, details the specific procedures that this study used to recruit participants and collect data, and outlines the data analysis plan. This section aims to provide a sufficient description level so that other researchers can replicate the research design with a different population.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The study participants included female leaders in Toronto from companies whose workforce is predominantly knowledge workers who, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the organizations they work within have publicly committed to adopting a flexible operating structure, called the hybrid workplace model permanently. This flexible operating structure allows employees to divide their time working both in-office and remotely. The participants of this study were all female leaders who had experienced a transition from leading an in-office team to the hybrid workplace model.

The sampling strategies used in this study were purposive and snowball sampling strategies (Robinson, 2014; Valerio et al., 2016). The purposive sampling strategy was used first to support the selection, and the recruitment of initial participants was based on those who have experienced transitioning from leading in a face-to-face environment to a hybrid workplace model during the COVID-19 pandemic. Professional relationships

before the study had already been established with The Center for Leadership Studies® and female leadership organizations such as Coralus (formerly SheEO), Forward Together, and the Universal Women's Network, which proved to be valuable network connections to female leaders associated with each of these organizations in addition to my LinkedIn network and group of connections to female leaders from across North America on LinkedIn.

During each interview, participants were asked if they could recommend prospective female leader participants as part of the snowball sampling strategy (Patton, 2015). As part of my interview guide and protocol during the recruitment phase of the study, a brief initial conversation with prospective participants took place to ensure that they met the minimum criteria for participating in the study. The minimum participant criteria involved holding either a mid-level or senior-level management position in a company that has an office in Toronto that is committed to permanently adopting a hybrid workplace model, being responsible for leading a minimum of five employees, and having some knowledge and experience with applying the e-leadership or situational leadership style.

Efforts were made to intentionally ensure that the selection of participants represented a diverse range of ethnicities and races. Study participants participated in one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews consistent with an interpretive research approach to gain insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Member checking took place immediately following the transcription of each study participant. A verbatim transcript of the participants' interviews was provided

to each study participant by email within one day of the interview taking place, allowing participants to review their transcripts for accuracy and make any necessary corrections.

According to Peoples (2021), in hermeneutic phenomenological studies, the traditional range of participants falls within 10 to 15 participants to achieve a high level of research saturation and discover meaningful differences and similar experiences without the risk of being overwhelmed by data (Peoples, 2021). This study involved a total of 18 participants. As the research and analysis were conducted, a detailed description of each participant was documented to manage the potential for researcher biases effectively, and participants, as previously explained, gained access to the verbatim transcripts of their interviews to ensure a high level of information accuracy (Peoples, 2021; Smith et al., 2009). According to Dibley et al. 2020, it is essential in hermeneutic phenomenology studies to begin participant recruitment using a “purposive” (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 141) recruitment strategy to ensure that participants have experienced the specific and narrowly focused lived experiences explored in this study, followed by a snowball recruitment strategy to ensure the randomness of participation, which was achieved in this study.

Participants who met the study criteria were purposely selected and invited to participate by multiple forms of communication including email, the integrated messaging system available through LinkedIn, phone, or a combination of all methods of communication. Those participants recruited through the snowballing sample strategy most often involved a direct introduction from the study participant, a referral, a response to my study advertisement on LinkedIn, or a direct response from my study website

contacting me by email, phone, or a combination of both. The participant recruitment process involved having participants consent to use their data in this study and approval to record interviews for further transcription and analysis post-interview by the researcher. The consent form explained how the data gathered from the research would support the study and potential academic articles in the future. The form highlighted that study participants would be allowed to review their final transcript and were provided details related to confidentiality, among other critical ethical considerations.

Ethical compliance rules for researchers established by the IRB were observed when collecting and analyzing the data. All participants remained anonymous, their confidential transcripts were only seen by the individual participants and me for member checking, and all associated documents were password protected. Each participant was assigned a code name (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2). Obtaining consent was critical to the ethical integrity of the study, and interviews with each participant were only conducted after receiving consent from each participant.

### **Instrumentation**

The data for this study began with the literature review, which provided a better foundational understanding of the existing body of knowledge related to all the concepts and theories identified in the conceptual framework of this study. The primary basis for data collection involved conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with female leaders who meet the participant criteria, with all interviews conducted using the Zoom teleconferencing platform. The semi-structured interview allowed me to have greater flexibility when asking participants follow-up questions, which is necessary for gaining a

deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences (Kallio et al., 2016). All interviews included voice and video recordings to ensure accurate representation of audio, visuals, and interpretations of each participant's verbal and body language and for accurate transcription and interpretation of each interview. A comprehensive interview guide that included interview protocols detailing the critical topics that helped gain insights into participants' lived experiences and a list of semi-structured interview questions was created.

Before formally interviewing the first participant, I piloted the interview guide by asking the interview questions to two female doctoral students, my peers, and four female leaders who industry experts in their field are and matched the participant study criteria to ensure the questions were understood, flowed effectively from one question to the other, were structured to generate the data necessary to answer the two RQs, and worded so that participants would understand each interview question. The interview guide incorporated the following elements:

1. A one-page overview of this research study's purpose, problem, central questions, and potential for social good (see Appendix A).
2. List of open-ended interview questions, including introductory and concluding statements, which were verbalized to participants before and after each interview (see Appendix B).
3. Templates for participant communication email templates, including the participant invitation email, interview confirmation, and scheduling email with consent form attached, and thank you for participating message, which

was accompanied by a copy of the individual participant unique transcript to review attached for each participant review (see Appendix C).

4. Participant recruitment advertisement copy (see Appendix D).
5. Participant recruitment website copy (see Appendix E).
6. Interview questions (see Appendix F).

Special care was taken to establish a digital organization system to ensure all data gathered for the study was easily retrievable for future analysis and held in a manner that ensures the data is safe and remains confidential. To ensure high rigor and reliability, an expert panel of peers and female leaders who match the study qualifications that will not be participating in the study itself helped to evaluate my interview guide, the interview questions, and a high-level summary of the findings generated from the data analysis to achieve high validity. Other sources of primary data collected included the raw audio files of interviews conducted with participants and transcriptions of interviews using the transcription service Scribie.com.

Interview transcriptions were entered into Microsoft Excel and uploaded to NVivo to keep the research organized and support the data analysis. However, Excel was the primary tool used for data analysis. Microsoft OneNote was used to capture research journal notes, interview notes, interview observations, audit notes during the interview, and research memos (Alase, 2017). Study participants were given copies of their transcribed interviews and allowed to make any necessary corrections, clarifications, or additions to enhance rigor and reliability.

The sources of secondary data collection included the comprehensive literature review of peer-reviewed journal articles published within the past 5 years, including documents provided by participants or public/private sector industry organizations such as The Center for Leadership Studies® and industry studies published by credible organizations, who have offered to provide me with access to relevant data in the form of published studies, educational videos, and training materials on Situational Leadership® style. Additional technical resources used in this study included Adobe Illustrator to create supporting illustrations for my study findings, such as the conceptual framework and thematic mapping. Thematic analysis of primary and secondary data (Braun & Clarke, 2022b) involved thematic data analysis predominately using Microsoft Excel, Word, and OneNote.

This study involved the use of a purposive and snowball sample strategy, with a focus on interviewing those participants that shared the specific lived experience explored in this study and included some of the insightful and impactful participant's verbatim responses that strongly support an essential argument using the participants' voice, and structure member checks following each interview (Smith et al., 2009). When conducting the interviews and accessing primary and secondary data sources, all ethical compliance rules and regulations set forth by IRB for data gathering and analysis were followed. Achieving validity and reliability was essential to the integrity of my findings.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The data necessary for answering the two primary RQs involved collecting primary and secondary data. The primary data collection instrument involved semi-

structured interviews conducted remotely using Zoom with 18 participants, and the data's depth reached saturation when the following occurred: no additional new data emerged from interviews with participants sharing repetitive lived experiences and redundant insights; theoretical saturation was reached with sufficient data necessary to answer the two RQs having obtained enough data to understand the phenomenon; having captured rich and detailed lived experiences along with real firsthand examples making it possible for me as the researcher to achieve an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of data; and finally the emergence of three thematic map's with well-defined themes that emerged from the data coding and analysis process that provided a strong understanding of the data findings and their interconnections that provide explicit answers to the two RQs; while also offering a strong and more robust understanding of the conceptual framework guiding this study, and potentially future additional research studies from data findings becoming too complex and dense.

Participants were recruited from organizations in the knowledge economy operating in Toronto that have publicly committed to permanently adopting a hybrid workplace model; therefore, the study participants' search begin with identifying organizations that meet the criteria related to having experienced transitioning to a hybrid workplace model. Lists of organizations located in Toronto that have transitioned to a hybrid workplace model were available in studies such as the one written by Wyld (2022), a peer-reviewed study that provided a list of companies in the knowledge economy that have permanently and publicly stated their commitment to a flexible operating structure, a hybrid workplace model. The next step involved identifying leaders

within target organizations that meet the participant criteria and extending an invitation to participate in the study by contacting them through email, phone, or LinkedIn messenger. The second strategy involved directly connecting with female leaders within my network who meet the participant criteria, launching my research study website, and promoting the recruitment of study participants on LinkedIn. The research journey was documented diligently in a journal and within purposeful memos, which included writing about my findings and highlighting relevant observations that connect to relevant theories and concepts.

Secondary data was available in the form of peer-reviewed articles and studies. The following primary journals for academic literature were used: Emerald Insights, ABI/INFORM Collection, JSTOR, ProQuest, PsycINFO, Scopus Review, IEEE Xplore, Google Scholar, EBSCO Business Source Complete, ResearchGate, Science Direct, and Frontiers. The primary journals that were used for academic literature included the following: Frontiers in Psychology, Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, Journal of International Management, Gender in Management, Gender in Management, Leadership & Organizational Development Journal, The Learning Organization, Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, Journal of Business and Psychology, Harvard Business Review, MIT Sloan, Journal of Business Strategy, International Journal of Organizational Analysis, and Journal of Industrial Psychology. In addition to academic journals, a private-sector study conducted annually by McKinsey called “Women in the Workplace,” which is available publicly was also considered; technology was leveraged while conducting the study, which included using Zotero to help manage large volumes

of references, Microsoft OneNote to keep a journal of my research progress, ideas, and findings, along with Excel and NVivo which helped me effectively code and analyze both primary and secondary data. The online tool Calendly was also used to help schedule participant interviews. I was the sole qualitative researcher responsible for collecting all primary and secondary data, supported by my Walden University Committee.

The duration of the data collection events commenced upon receiving approval of my proposal by my Walden University Doctoral Committee, successful completion of my oral defense presentation of my proposal, and approval of my application to conduct research to the Walden University IRB. The primary data collection, transcription, and member checking took 11 weeks. The duration of each interview was approximately 45 minutes to one hour to respect the participant's time. Data was recorded from the one-on-one interviews using the Zoom teleconferencing software and GarageBand as a secondary backup should there have been any potential issues with the Zoom audio recordings. Participants were asked to provide consent for recording the audio, and participants were informed that the audio files would be password-protected and destroyed following the study 5 years after publishing my dissertation. As the researcher, I took notes during and after the interviews using Microsoft OneNote.

When recruiting participants, each participant was provided with a one-page overview of the study that spoke to the background of the study, the purpose, the RQs, and the potential for positively affecting social change. Once qualified participants who met the study criteria indicated a willingness to participate in my qualitative study, they were sent a formal written invitation to participate in an interview via publicly available

email addresses with an informed consent statement that they were asked to agree to by responding to my message. The informed consent covered the interview procedures, voluntary nature of the interview, risks, and benefits of being interviewed, as well as privacy. Participants were given the direct contact information of a representative at Walden University should they have any questions.

Participants were assigned a code name to ensure their name was not associated with the data. Upon receiving the participant's informed consent, participants were provided a link to Calendly, a software tool enabling them to select an interview day and time that works best with their schedule. Once the interview date and time were agreed upon, participants received a confirmation email with a password-protected link to Zoom to ensure a high level of security, and participants were encouraged to participate in the interview in a private space. A maximum of one interview a day was conducted to allow for a significant amount of time to write reflective journal notes immediately following each interview; providing me with the necessary time to document key insights and visual observations from the interview while also journaling my initial thoughts as a researcher, feelings, and perceptions to remove any potential biases. The interview guide was followed in each interview, which provided an introductory statement and closing statement that informed the participant of the process; and informed them of the security and privacy steps that were in place to ensure that their identity and interview would remain confidential and provide them with confidence that insights from their interviews cannot be linked back to them.

Participants were asked to give verbal consent to record the audio of their one-on-one interview before it could begin. Participants were also reminded that they should not feel pressured to answer all questions, that the interview could stop at any point, and that they could provide other information that they deemed relevant, even if it was not directly linked to any specific question. After the interview, participants were informed that they would be given a verbatim transcript of their interview to review. Participants were encouraged to review the transcript and make any necessary changes. Participants were also asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview for further clarification and to explore specific topics and insights should it be necessary. The interview questions are listed in Appendix F. Participants were allowed to ask questions to ensure they were comfortable with the process and thoroughly understood the questions they were being asked during the interview. Following the completion of the study, all audio recordings, transcripts, and notes are currently being kept in a safe and electronically with password protection and will be destroyed 5 years after publishing my dissertation.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The thematic analysis is not a linear process; it is not “a unidirectional movement, but shifts in and out across the analytic phases” (Braun & Clarke, 2022b, p.76). Taking a thematic analysis approach to the data analysis of this study involved six distinctly different phases, which included (a) data collection and familiarization, (b) creation of initial codes, (c) creation of initial themes, (d) theme development and reviewing, (e) theme refining, defining, and naming, and (f) writing the results in response to the RQs

(Braun & Clarke, 2022b, pp. 34-152). The following section provides greater insight into each of the six phases of this systematic thematic analysis approach and outlines the specific activities I conducted within each phase:

***Phase 1: Data Collection and Familiarization***

This phase involved collecting and organizing primary data sets, including one-on-one semi-structured interviews and follow-up audio recordings and transcriptions, research study journal notes, interview notes, interview observational and audit notes, and research and analytic memos (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). Secondary data sets included peer-reviewed articles, industry studies, reports, presentations, white papers, educational videos, and leadership training materials (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). During each phase of the thematic analysis, as the researcher, I regularly wrote memos throughout the entire research process, which included my reflections, ideas, and discoveries (Peoples, 2021). Information from data sets was uploaded to NVivo and entered in Microsoft Excel, which was the primary data analysis tool used for the manual data analysis conducted in this study. Accuracy of all references was ensured for all documented data sets maintained in Zotero's reference management tool. I gathered data to seek meaning and insights to help answer the study's two RQs. All transcriptions were completed using the transcription service Scribie.com, which provided a verbatim transcription of every interview; I double-checked transcripts for accuracy before sending them to the study participants for member checking.

### ***Phase 2: Creation of Initial Codes***

This phase involved the systematic creation of codes involving identifying keywords derived from raw primary and secondary data sets that enabled potential interconnections to emerge from the data in the form of concepts, ideas, and themes — creating codes involved multiple cycles, including a descriptive, concept, and pattern cycle (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). The initial coding phase began with the systematic process of identifying similarities, contradictions, and differences found in the data sets, an inductive process in qualitative research that focuses on allowing meaning to emerge from the data. Codes also emerged from phenomenological reflections and valuable human insights from study participants' conscious experiences (Hein & Austin, 2001; van Manen, 2016). During this step, codes were created in the form of a single word, a phrase, a full sentence, and even complete paragraphs that portray a complete thought or concept. Some codes were highly complex and abstract, created from participants' responses to the questions asked during the interview, including experiences, perceptions, individual perspectives, and memories (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

One of the primary functions of a code is its innate ability to allow the researcher to recall and retrieve data that is similar and provides a framework for categorizing and organizing data, making it easier to interpret and applying sensemaking to the data sets, which involves making sense of the data concerning the two primary RQs (Hein & Austin, 2001). The coding strategy involved the identification of potential codes before conducting the coding exercises with my primary data, namely creating a list of potential codes that emerge based on my analysis of secondary data such as peer-reviewed articles

and studies (Braun & Clarke, 2022b; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The initial coding process was conducted manually through hand-coding using Microsoft Excel, and in parallel coding, participant interview transcripts were also coded in NVivo. Coding began as early as the literature review stage, predominately using Excel and a well-structured spreadsheet system. The data captured in Excel was also color-coded to make it easier to organize, store, code, assign themes, and analyze qualitative data sets.

### ***Phase 3: Creation of Initial Themes***

This phase involved the initial creation of themes, the identification of critical concepts, and the creation of abstract themes derived from codes providing a greater level of complexity and analysis with the identification of patterns and cross-patterns with the creation of themes to create hierarchies, making it possible to reassemble the data findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). Categories and themes (Hein & Austin, 2001) were used to help make sense of the data concerning the two RQs explored in the study and emerged from the data analysis in the form of patterns and interconnections, which allowed meaning to emerge from the data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2022b; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). According to Castleberry and Nolen (2018), “themes are patterns in the codes” (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018, p. 809), allowing me, as the researcher, to see the bigger picture of the data related directly to the RQs. Thematic hierarchies were used during this stage to produce visual illustrations of the data themes and associated codes to communicate the relationships, patterns, and hierarchies effectively.

Data and analysis at this stage were essential for future defense of my interpretations of the data findings and overall study conclusions. Upon completing each

interview and receiving the final transcript that the participant approved, I coded the data in a timely manner to ensure accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2022b; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). NVivo was used to help create the initial codes. However, Microsoft Excel was the predominant tool used to code and create categories and themes throughout the thematic analysis.

#### ***Phase 4: Theme Development and Review***

This phase focused on interpreting the data from the perspective of making analytical conclusions based on the codes, categories, and themes that helped to provide insights and answers to the two RQs (Hein & Austin, 2001). Interpreting during this step was done at a higher level when compared to themes, as the conclusions provided a more extensive overview. During this phase, as the researcher, it was essential that I took the time necessary to identify and confirm patterns found in data sets and, when necessary, seek additional data sets, particularly when any discrepant data sets were identified. The entire thematic analysis process was not a linear process (Braun & Clarke, 2022b; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Instead, the data analysis process involved many iterations as new findings emerged. I manually interpreted the data, as this step mainly relied on my analytical capability. Microsoft Excel and Word were used to write analytical conclusions based on my research journal notes, interview notes, research memos, and interview observational notes recorded in Microsoft OneNote.

#### ***Phase 5: Theme Refinement, Definition, and Naming***

This phase focused on the revision of themes and thematic mapping that involved the identification of both patterns discovered in the data along with outliers (Braun &

Clarke, 2022b). At this stage, thematic mapping was created for RQ1 and RQ2 based on the thematic data analysis. This phase involved further refining themes through interpretation relative to the two primary RQs while defining the meaning behind and explicitly naming core themes. This phase involved the creation of detailed theme definitions and descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2022b).

***Phase 6: Writing of the Results and Responses to the Research Questions***

This final phase involved writing conclusions and answers to the two primary RQs and speaking to the research purpose, supported by primary and secondary research. Future research opportunities were also identified from the perspective of new knowledge required to build upon the existing body of knowledge. Findings were summarized so that there was a high level of transparency throughout the research and data analysis stages (Braun & Clarke, 2022b; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The conclusion and findings that answer the primary two RQs were like the previous step four and relied heavily on the researcher's sensemaking skills and analytical capability. Microsoft Word was used to write analytical conclusions based on my notes in Microsoft Word, OneNote, and Excel—all steps in the data analysis process involved following the rules and regulations set forth by the IRB.

While performing these six phases, there was a strong focus on sensemaking and answering the two primary RQs: both primary and secondary data gathered during this qualitative study was analyzed using the thematic data analysis method focused on the analysis and interpretation of data that provided a logical structure and process for me as the researcher to code the phenomenological data I gathered. During this study, I

identified all emerging themes and discovered patterns in the data representing participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022b; Hein & Austin, 2001; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Given the importance of "adopting a phenomenological attitude" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12), thematic analysis aligns strongly with hermeneutic phenomenological research. With a strong focus on reflexivity and the role I played as the researcher, I intentionally reflected on a process, critically reflecting on my role as an interpreter and "reflective practitioner" (Iacono et al., 2009), more specifically my role in analyzing, interpreting, and assigning meaning to the lived experiences of participants throughout the study (Braun & Clarke, 2022b; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Smith et al., 2009).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Using thematic analysis as a data analysis approach helped me provide a "rich, detailed, and complex account of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2008a, p. 1760), positively impacting my study's trustworthiness and overall authenticity. This section describes the approach taken upon receiving approval from the IRB to conduct my qualitative research study to ensure a high level of trustworthiness, specifically, the strategy and actions that helped me to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility, according to Peoples (2021), relates to the credibility of a study's findings (Peoples, 2021), which speaks to how truthful the research findings are and their ability to be confirmed by others (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999). This study established credibility by adopting internal validity strategies, including triangulation, prolonged contact with participants throughout the study, member checks, saturation, reflexivity and

bracketing, and peer reviews. I triangulated the data by searching for at least three unique ways to confirm and verify research findings and data sources. Prolonged contact with participants began with establishing a communication strategy designed to keep the participants informed and engaged. Communication with participants started at the recruitment stage. A two-way communication channel continued during the interview and member-checking stages, where participants were allowed to review the interview transcripts for accuracy of interpretation and content while offering opportunities to provide additional relevant information to the study.

Every effort was made to ensure participants felt appreciated, as they were also given assurance that their identity would remain anonymous, beginning with assigning a code to each participant (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2) and providing a summary of the study findings and a copy of the final study to each study participant upon publishing of this dissertation. Interviews were conducted with participants who met the required study criteria. Secondary data were gathered until no additional information was identified through a literature review and interviews with participants; data saturation was identified during the data collection and analysis phases (Braun & Clarke, 2022b).

The research process involved bracketing, regularly documenting my experience as a researcher in a journal, and identifying potential biases, perceptions, and experiences that could have affected how data was interpreted as a reflexive research practitioner. Before conducting the interviews, my interview questions were first piloted on four female leaders who met the study participant requirements to ensure any necessary changes were made to the interview questions prior to conducting interviews with study

participants. Also, upon establishing my thematic maps highlighting the study's high-level findings, a summary of the 23 themes was shared with two industry experts who met the study's participation requirements for their initial assessment and review. My Walden University committee and pre-established connections with industry experts also provided further support throughout the research and data analysis stages. Study credibility was achieved partly by ensuring my interview questions aligned with the two RQs. All efforts were made to ensure that participants had a positive interview experience by creating an environment where they felt comfortable while also building trust by listening to their responses, asking follow-up questions, and showing my gratitude for their time and insights into their lived experiences.

### **Transferability**

Transferability relates to the ability of a study's results to be transferable or generalized to other populations that experience similar lived experiences (Peoples, 2021). Transferability was established in this study by adopting external validity strategies, including the use of thick descriptions, and ensuring a variation in participant selection so that qualitative researchers can understand the degree to which the results of my study may be transferable to different studies or contexts from a generalized perspective (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Efforts to enhance the potential for transferability involved providing a detailed description of the study protocols, including the descriptive interview guide and participant recruitment strategy, making it easier for future researchers to replicate the study (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). Throughout recruiting and engaging with study participants, gathering data, interpreting data, and presenting

findings, thick, rich descriptions were used to enhance interpretation and, ultimately, the study's potential for transferability.

### **Dependability**

Dependability was established in this study by adopting the following strategies incorporated into the research process and protocols, such as research audit trail and triangulation, identified in the credibility section (Carcary, 2009). Each phase of the qualitative research study was documented using Microsoft OneNote and Word to create a detailed and transparent audit trail of decisions and steps taken throughout the study to ensure that the study results were based upon the research findings and not strongly influenced by the researcher's personal experiences, perspectives, and potential biases (Carcary, 2009). The audit trail, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is comprised of six categories, including "raw data; data reduction and analysis notes; data reconstruction and synthesis; process notes; materials related to intentions and dispositions; and preliminary development information" (pp. 15-16).

Dependability was achieved by being well-organized and maintaining a high standard for collecting, organizing, and filing primary and secondary research data collected, as well as maintaining highly detailed and easily accessible record-keeping at each research stage. Being well-organized at every stage of this study involved leveraging technology to document the process in Microsoft Word, Excel, and OneNote. All files associated with this study were well organized in a very easy-to-understand electronic filing system that included creating an easy-to-understand name for electronic file folders and electronic documents with date and version control within the file name

itself. My reflective journal, maintained in Microsoft OneNote, provided transparent insights into my thoughts, feelings, experiences, and perspectives while openly identifying any potential for personal biases, which positively influenced the level of study dependability.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability relates to the ability to check the study results against other data sources; confirmable studies have a lower potential for researcher bias (Peoples, 2021). Confirmability was established in this study by adopting strategies such as reflexivity, which is essential for establishing trustworthiness. Through reflexivity, other future researchers who desire to replicate this study can follow a detailed research process and protocols to confirm findings. Reflexivity began with establishing a solid understanding of my role as a researcher. According to researcher Berger (2015), self-knowledge is critical to successful research, along with the intentional awareness and self-monitoring of personal values, beliefs, and perspectives, along with experiences and the impact these could have on the gathering and interpretation of data at each stage of the research journey (Berger, 2015). Reflexivity began with “turning the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one’s situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied” (Berger, 2015, p. 220). Reflexivity began at the proposal phase and continued throughout the entire study.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The standard application for research ethics review was submitted as part of the requirements for a petition requesting formal approval from Walden University’s IRB to

conduct this qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study (*Academic Guides*, n.d.). The approval number is 07-31-23-1039013. Ethical approaches and procedures are aligned with the IRB's guidelines for participant recruitment, primary and secondary data collection, and data analysis. Informed consent was received from each participant before conducting the interview field (Sanjari et al., 2014), and it was made clear to all study participants that their participation was voluntary. Participants were made aware that at any point during the study, they could either stop the interview, choose not to respond to a question, or decide not to participate in the study altogether. For those participants who committed to studying participation, the anonymity of each participant was achieved by assigning a reference code and ensuring that no information was available that could potentially reveal participants' identities (Sanjari et al., 2014).

All primary data sets collected during the study existed only on my personal password-protected computer. All hardcopy printed documents with sensitive data, such as participant transcripts, are locked in a file cabinet in my home office, which is also locked. Participants received oral and written confirmation of the entire process, including an outlining of their rights and reassurance of how confidentially and ethical standards would be maintained, including the destruction of all participant interview audio recordings and transcripts 5 years after publishing the study. Participants were treated with the utmost respect and appreciation throughout the research process, and no power differentials existed between me and the study participants. Every effort was made to ensure that my study followed all critical ethical procedures outlined in the research methods section.

## Summary

This chapter provides the rationale for using qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological as the research design to explore the lived experience of female leaders transitioning to leading teams of knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model and explains my role as the researcher. Insights into the research methodology were provided, including explaining the participant selection logic, instrumentations used in the study, and procedures used for recruitment, participation, and data collection. This chapter also presented the data analysis plan, which included six phases involved in conducting research that aligned with a thematic analysis approach to data analysis. Finally, insights were provided, identifying how credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were established and acknowledging that the study was conducted ethically, following all IRB's rules and regulations. In the next section, Chapter 4 provides the results of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study and includes the following areas of focus research setting: demographics, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenology qualitative study was to focus on understanding and describing through the exploration of lived experiences any potential new barriers and opportunities female leaders must navigate when transitioning from leading in a purely remote workplace during COVID-19 to leading in a permanent hybrid workplace model, along with understanding and describing any potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style. The two RQs that were used to explore this problem included understanding the lived experiences of female leaders who have transitioned to leading in a hybrid workplace model, identifying new barriers and opportunities they must navigate, and the benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model. Qualitative data were obtained by conducting semi-structured one-on-one interviews with 18 study participants comprised of female leaders in mid-level or senior-level management, leading a team of knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model in a company with an office in Toronto, Canada. The study participant's level of leadership experience ranged from being promoted to leadership within the past 3 years to being a seasoned leader with more than 20 years of experience.

Chapter 4 explores the steps taken during this study's data collection and analysis phase, sharing insight into the experiences from the researcher's perspective and the study findings from the participants' lived experiences. Technology that proved to help collect and analyze the data found in this chapter included the use of Calendarly to schedule interviews, Zoom to conduct interviews and generate an audio recording,

Scribe.com to help with the initial verbatim transcription, Microsoft OneNote to take researcher journal and memos, and predominately using Excel to code and analysis data, along with NVivo to a more limited extent to organize and code data. This study involved the use of a non-linear thematic analysis approach to coding, identifying categories, creating themes, and writing the findings that answer the two RQs. This chapter explores the research setting demographics of study participants, explains the data collection and analysis steps taken, presents evidence of trustworthiness, explores the study results, and summarizes the results chapter.

### **Research Setting**

All semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted using the paid version of Zoom without transcription enabled. The use of Zoom to conduct all the interviews enabled study participants to participate in the interview at a private location of their choice. Participants provided me with the interview day and time that worked best for them and were informed of the options of conducting the interview during working hours, after hours, or on weekends to ensure that they were able to schedule participation in this study at a day and time that was most convenient for them personally and professionally.

Personal or organizational conditions that had the potential to influence or shape study participants' perspective in relation to the personal experience they are sharing while responding to study questions during the one-on-one interview, and therefore the potential to influence the interpretation of the study results include the following five conditions: organizational structure, external influences and experiences, life journey, emotional well-being, study motivation, and expectations. Beginning with looking at the

organizational work environment, all participants were female leaders sharing the experience of leading during a global pandemic, but with different perspectives as some participants were newly promoted to leadership positions during the lockdown or were experienced leaders but had joined the company before the pandemic. From an external influences and experiences perspective, each participant had a different perspective since each company follows a hybrid workplace model customized to meet their unique needs as one-size-does-not-fit-all, and all participants confirmed that the final flexible hybrid operating structure is still evolving.

Looking at a life transition perspective, Participant 9 shared that she was pregnant and specifically shared her lived experiences concerning the benefits hybrids offer her given her situation. From an emotional well-being perspective, several participants were vulnerable in sharing their personal experiences of struggling with mental health during the pandemic, which could have provided them with an empathetic understanding and perspective when it comes to mental health in the workplace, given their personal firsthand experiences. Finally, from a study motivation and expectations perspective, most of the participants shared experiences of gender inequality, and all participants were eager to read the results of this study, given that the findings could prove helpful to them personally as leaders. The following section provides an in-depth analysis of the demographic profile of study participants, which includes demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, study results, and a summary of this chapter.

## Demographics

The demographic profile of the 18 study participants is summarized in Table 1. All study participants were female leaders who met the study participant criteria, including holding a mid-level or senior-level management position, leading a team of a minimum of five employees in a permanent hybrid workplace model, and having some knowledge or experience with Situational Leadership® style or e-leadership. Industries represented in this study all fell within the knowledge economy. The largest industry represented in this study was the banking industry, followed by consumer goods marketing, architecture, accounting, technology, financial and insurance, legal, entrepreneurship, and business consulting. Eight participants had five direct reports, an additional eight had five to 10 direct reports, and the remaining had 11 to 14 direct reports. Three participants had a significant number of employees within their portfolio, including Participant 3, with 6,500 employees; Participant 8, with 800 employees; and Participant 1, with 300 employees.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Leadership position	Industry type	No. of direct Reports	Time in leadership position
Participant 1	F	Regional vice president	Insurance	14	6 years
Participant 2	F	Assistant vice president	Banking	9	3.5 years
Participant 3	F	People consultant Director	Health care research	5+	2 years
Participant 4	F	Partner	Architecture	40	5 years
Participant 5	F	Head of Human Resources	Architecture	6	12 years
Participant 6	F	Director	Consumer goods Marketing	20	10 years
Participant 7	F	Director	Consumers goods marketing	30	14 months

Participant 8	F	General Manager	Food and beverage Marketing division	5+	6 months
Participant 9	F	Director	Accounting	5+	5 years
Participant 10	F	National leader	Banking	17	2 months
Participant 11	F	Director of organizational development	Technology	5+	3 years
Participant 12	F	Managing partner	Legal	7	4.5 years
Participant 13	F	Entrepreneur	Human resources consulting	5+	5 years
Participant 14	F	Partner	Accounting	5+	10 years
Participant 15	F	Lead acquisition and brand marketing	Banking	5+	3 months
Participant 16	F	Head of environmental, social, governance	Technology	5+	6 years
Participant 17	F	Human resources leader	Accounting	5+	4.5 years
Participant 18	F	Manager of client services, specialized services	Banking	11	35 years

It is important to note that despite all participants working within the knowledge economy and relying heavily on knowledge workers capable of working from anywhere, most participants have some roles that required some groups of employees to permanently be in-person due to the specific job requirements, along with the needs of some customers or clients. For example, bank tellers and those companies that have a manufacturing component to their business create an environment where some employees are permanently operating in a hybrid workplace model while other employees have limited flexibility when it comes to being able to work remotely. Some employees within the participant's organization have no flexibility and must be in the office. The following section explores the data collection process during this study.

### **Data Collection**

Throughout the data collection phase, the focus concentrated on ensuring the trustworthiness of the qualitative data. Data collection also conformed to the hermeneutic

phenomenological qualitative study approach, making it possible to collect primary data that offers insight into understanding, interpreting, and making sense of the lived experiences (Dibley et al., 2020) of this study, female leaders who experienced leading a team of knowledge workers in Toronto, transitioning from a traditional in-office environment to leading in a permanent hybrid workplace model. The participant recruitment involved the creation of a set of tools necessary to recruit and communicate with study participants throughout the study.

A purposeful and snowball sampling strategy was implemented, and all efforts were made to ensure that participants were randomly selected (Eatough & Smith, 2008). To purposefully recruit the initial participants, before leveraging a snowball sampling strategy, I posted a participant recruitment advertisement on LinkedIn (see Appendix D); the ad provided information about the study but also directed prospective participants interested in the study to visit a website called ([www.thehybridworkplace.ca](http://www.thehybridworkplace.ca)) that was set-up specifically for study participant recruitment attraction purposes and offered prospective participants more details about the study, which allowed those interested in participating to contact me by email, phone, or email me directly through the website which was connected to my university email address. Most participants in this study came through LinkedIn, as many individuals on LinkedIn shared my advertisement to their connections.

At the same time, some female leadership or gender equality-focused organizations and groups, also of their own accord, took the initiative to post this advertisement in their private groups and share it with their communications, given their

interest in seeing more research emerge on this topic, along with their desire to support gender equality in the workplace including supporting research being conducted on this topic. Study participants were recruited through purposeful and snowball sampling strategies, which involved asking participants to make introductions to other prospective participants within and outside their organization. Study participants were pre-screened to ensure that all participants met the minimum requirements for participation by having a brief conversation prior to scheduling the interview to confirm each participant met the study criteria, which included being a female leader in a mid-level or senior-level management position, leading a minimum of five knowledge workers who experienced leading a team during the COVID-19 pandemic, and having transitioned to leading a team now in a hybrid workplace model, along with having some knowledge or experience with e-leadership or Situational Leadership® style.

A total of 27 prospective participants inquired about participating throughout the data collection phase; 21 participants were pre-qualified, and 18 participants who scheduled interviews met the minimum study requirements and, based on their level of expertise and experience specific to the phenomenon being studied, were also chosen for their capability to provide an in-depth and detailed, rich level of data. Upon confirmation of meeting the study requirements, participants were sent an email message (see Appendix C) that contained a link to an online scheduling tool called Calendarly that allowed them to select the best day and time that worked with their schedule, along with the consent form attached for their review. Flexible meeting options were given to participants, including dates and times during working hours, in the evening, and on the

weekend; all participants scheduled dates during the work week within working hours. Before participating in the study, each participant gave me informed consent in advance to participate by email. The success of recruitment for this study can be attributed to selecting a research topic that not only represents a gap in scholarly knowledge but also represents a pain point for professionals in the industry who are seeking new knowledge that can help them make strategic decisions as they continue to transition to a new normal with respects to adopting a new hybrid workplace model. The other contributing factors included using LinkedIn to promote the study and creating a website that offered prospective participants more information on the study and a way to contact the researcher directly.

The data collection began in August 2023, beginning with participant recruitment and qualitative data that involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 18 study participants, with the first interview taking place on September 6, 2023, and the last interview taking place on October 30, 2023, as outlined in Table 2. All interviews took place using the Zoom video meeting software. Every participant agreed to the interview being recorded on Zoom in writing before the interview was scheduled and again at the start of each interview; all audio files were transcribed verbatim 24 hours. after the interview was conducted and provided by email to the respective participants (see Appendix C) for member checking purposes.

Before starting the interview, I read each participant an opening statement thanking them for participating, providing an overview of the study and RQs being explored, reminding them that they do not have to answer any questions and that they can

stop at any time, and asking if they have any questions. After each interview, I read each participant a concluding statement outlining the steps that would follow. During the interview, I asked each participant the same open-ended questions (see Appendix F), along with asking, when appropriate, probing and follow-up questions to provide examples to collect a high level of richness and depth necessary for a high level of study trustworthiness, along with taking the first steps of sensemaking of the participate data itself (Cassell et al., 2018). Within hours of completing the interview, each study participant received a message thanking them for participating and telling them to expect a copy of the verbatim transcript within 24 hours. (see Appendix C). Concerning member checking, none of the participants had any corrections or additional information to add to the verbatim participant interview transcripts, and all participants were happy with the content provided for them to review.

Participants were only required to participate in one interview that lasted on average approximately one hour. or less, except for some participants who were fully engaged in the conversation and were eager to continue to share information beyond the originally agreed upon time of 45 minutes to one hour. Study participants represented a wide range of industries, all of which are part of the knowledge economy and rely on a significant portion of their workforce being comprised of knowledge workers capable of performing their jobs in a hybrid workplace model, as outlined in Table 2. Of the total of 18 study participants, four participants represented the banking industry, three participants represented the accounting industry, the study included two participants from each of the following industries: consumer goods marketing, architecture, and

technology; and finally, the study included one participant from each of the following industries legal, human resources consulting, insurance, food and beverage marketing division, and health care research.

**Table 2**

*Participants' Industry Representation*

No. of participants	Industry represented
4	Banking
3	Accounting
2	Consumer goods marketing
2	Architecture
2	Technology
1	Legal
1	Human resources consulting
1	Insurance
1	Food and beverage marketing division
1	Health care research

Primary data sets collected in this study included one-on-one semi-structured interviews and follow-up audio recordings and transcriptions, research study journal notes, interview notes, interview observational and audit notes, and research and analytic memos (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). No secondary data were provided to me by the study participants. During this study, no unforeseen circumstances necessitated a deviation or modification from the original data collection strategy outlined in Chapter 3. The following section explores the data analysis process, provides insight into the codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the data, and identifies any discrepancies in the data.

## **Data Analysis**

Following a hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative study methodology and a thematic analysis approach to the qualitative data captured during one-on-one interviews, the literature review in Chapter 2 involved an inductive, non-linear, flexible, and iterative approach, which made it possible for me to ensure that I accurately captured the lived experience of female leaders, leading in a hybrid workplace model and could effectively apply sensemaking during the inductive phase and answered both RQs accurately.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2022b) approach to thematic analysis, the following six phases were followed when conducting this study: data collection and familiarization; creation of initial data codes; creation of initial themes; theme developing and reviewing; theme refining, defining and naming; and writing and the results and responding to the RQs.

### ***Phase 1: Data Collection and Familiarization***

As discussed in detail in the Data Collection section, I collected initial data by conducting a comprehensive literature review in Chapter 2. Primary data sets involved collecting data representing the lived experience of female leaders, leading in a hybrid workplace model by conducting one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 18 pre-qualified study participants (see Table 1) in this chapter's previous data collection section. Additional data that was included in the thematic analysis included the audio recordings captured in Zoom and verbatim transcripts of the interviews with participants, in addition to research study journal notes, interview notes, interview observational and

audit notes, and research and analytic memos (Peoples, 2021), which were all created in Microsoft OneNote, Word, and Excel (Braun & Clarke, 2022b).

I became more familiar with the data from the participants by listening to the interview recording multiple times, reading the transcripts in printed form, taking annotated notes, capturing my initial thoughts and reflections, and ensuring the accuracy of the transcripts against the audio recordings. All data sets were entered into Excel and uploaded into NVivo, with Excel being the primary tool used for thematic coding and analysis. Secondary sources, such as peer-reviewed articles and studies, were also included in Excel, with the critical studies having been coded in advance during the literature review phase of this study, which also involved capturing all resources using Zotero's reference management tool. During the reading through the data sets, this familiarization phase allowed me to document initial ideas, insights, and patterns in emerging data. This phase focused on gathering all the data necessary to uncover the meaning and insights necessary to answer the two RQs with high trustworthiness. Data continued to be captured until saturation was obtained, with no new information being obtained from interviews, and participants repetitively shared similar experiences.

### ***Phase 2: Creation of Initial Codes***

The data coding captured during the data collection phase began with the initial manual coding of each verbatim interview transcript, research study journal notes, interview notes, interview observational and audit notes, and research and analytic memos. All transcripts were initially formatted in Microsoft Word by aligning study participants' responses under the corresponding interview questions and adding

continuous line numbering for accurate and quick data reference of data findings. When conducting the initial coding of interview verbatim transcripts, I began by reading a hard copy of the transcript and, with color-coded highlighters, identified findings that were relevant to the specific RQ using the color orange for general foundational hybrid workplace model-related data, purple for barriers and pink for opportunities data corresponding to RQ1, and green to represent RQ2 with data referring to the Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> style in yellow to highlight any new and unexpected or discrepant data.

Data that did not relate directly to one of the two RQs or did not provide added value to the study needed to be coded. All transcripts were entered into Excel and imported into NVivo simultaneously for coding, and the same color-coding approach was used for consistency. In Excel, each participant's transcript was formatted so that it could be entered into its dedicated tab in Excel, with one tab created for each of the 18 individual study participants. Columns in the Excel file were created for coding the data, including interview transcription line number, responses obtained during the interview, descriptive codes, concept codes, and pattern codes (Braun & Clarke, 2022b), followed by one for quick memos or reflective notes.

A systematic approach to creating the initial codes involved identifying keywords derived from raw primary data, namely transcripts, and the previous coding of secondary data sets, namely the literature review in Chapter 2, which made identifying an initial set of codes possible. During this initial coding stage, I re-read participant interview transcripts multiple times. The initial coding process was conducted manually by hand,

utilizing Microsoft Excel and NVivo simultaneously; however, most of the thematic data analysis was performed in Excel.

Initial codes comprised a combination of in-vivo codes, verbatim words participants spoke during the interview, and descriptive codes that emerged from data analysis. The initial coding phase began the systematic process of identifying similarities, contradictions, and differences found in the data sets, an inductive process in qualitative research, with meaning emerging from the data. During this step, codes that were either a single word, a phrase, a whole sentence, or even complete paragraphs that express a complete thought or more in-depth concept were created. Taking an inductive approach to coding, focused on allowing findings in the form of codes to emerge from that data, the first step involved the identification of initial codes, which emerged during the familiarization stage.

To ensure a high level of rigor, codes were created and refined during multiple refining rounds (Braun & Clarke, 2022b); in this study, the codes and meaning behind the codes evolved after going through all 18 participant transcripts a minimum of three times. The steps taken to evolve the codes to ensure they accurately reflect the data led to the creation of a Code Framework used to code the participant's verbatim transcripts, capturing lived experiences by identifying critical ideas, concepts, perspectives, and overall patterns that emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). The number of initial codes during the thematic data analysis created was 147 (as shown in Appendix G), which were further refined throughout the iterative data analysis process, resulting in

a code framework consisting of 52 codes (as shown in Appendix H), with 29 codes associated with RQ1 and 23 codes associated with RQ2.

One of the critical codes that emerged that spoke to the unpredicted adoption of the new hybrid workplace model with companies that rely heavily on knowledge workers is the code “*adapting to a new normal*,” as all participants acknowledged that the permanent adoption of the hybrid workplace model as a new normal that is continuing to evolve and is yet in its final formation, in other words, the hybrid workplace model continues to evolve, and “*one-size-does-not-fit-all*” according to all study participants. Participant 2 stated, “I do think the hybrid model will stay,” while Participant 6 not only agreed with Participant 2 but explained why the hybrid model is here to stay by saying how “the hybrid model allows us to have the best of both worlds” referring to the benefits of having the flexibility to allow employees to have the option to work from home or anywhere while also benefiting from “the collaboration they get in-person” (Participant 6). All study participants recognize that the hybrid workplace model was not only not a one-size-does-not-fit-all model but that even within their departments, there were differences in the hybrid model within their organizations based upon each department’s unique needs; according to Participant 6, her hybrid workplace model is structured to “allow for flexibility on a per team basis.”

Critical codes that emerged from barriers female leaders experienced leading a team in a hybrid workplace model were “*leak in the pipeline*” and codes that emerged from opportunities female leaders experience, such as the “*humanization of the workplace*.” According to Participant 2, “I have seen a huge change in the pipeline of

female leaders, especially working moms, after the pandemic,” an experience and observation that many participants shared. Participant 6 provided further insight into the cause, explaining that the pipeline leak was attributed to female leaders “making the decision to not lean in” and not seeking promotional opportunities.

From an opportunity perspective, many participants shared stories and experiences of the humanization of the workplace. Most participants described many as male and female leaders with more empathy for employees. Participant 1 explains, “I think now we just have that line of sight where we know each other better verse just that work image;” Participant 1 continues to explain how the workplace has “become more human.” Participant 5 speaks about the importance of having a leadership style when leading in a hybrid workplace model that “Recognizes there is a whole human being in front of me, not just employee 14,725,” acknowledging the importance of employees as humans and not simply numbers.

Taking a closer look at the critical codes that emerged that speak to the benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model, one of the most discussed experiences among all study participants relates to the importance of understanding the specific and unique needs of each employee “*understanding employee’s unique capabilities and needs*” to tailor the leadership style effectively. This approach, according to Participant 8, is of critical importance, particularly for those new employees who are joining a hybrid workplace model where she explains how it is essential to “understand that humans behave differently and have different needs and roles of different needs” recognizing the importance of leading employees based upon

their needs and the particular requirements associated with their role, which can be further complicated when operating in a flexible hybrid workplace model according to Participant 3.

As the researcher, I have confidence in the final codes as they allowed me to make sense of the data and allowed for the emergence and evolution of themes that answer the two RQs (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). I took the necessary time to conduct a thematic data analysis, recognizing that the data analysis process at each phase is a “journey, not a destination” (Braun & Clarke, 2022b, p. 78). During the third step of coding, I clustered data together and saw potential themes emerge from the data.

***Phases 3 to 6: Creation of Initial Themes, Theme Development and Reviewing, and Theme Refining, Defining, and Naming***

Creating themes was an iterative process that evolved while coding and analyzing the study data findings. The initial themes were created based on the grouping of codes and identification of patterns in the data, initially identifying categories that emerge from the data while aligning with the specific RQs being explored in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). As new codes and patterns emerged, including interconnections among codes and themes presented themselves in the data, the themes were also adapted to ensure they accurately reflected the data findings and allowed the data to tell a story.

Any potential outliers in the data sets were also identified. The only outlier found in the data included one participant, Participant 2, who shared an experience that deviated from the other study participants, relating to a struggle she faced due to a leakage of female leaders in senior leaders, which resulted in having more than ten junior aspiring

female leaders who made a formal request for a female mentor impossible to fulfill. Participant 2 explained that, given the loss of female leaders who could also act as internal mentors in the workplace, many of the female leaders largely left the organization, according to Participant 2, due to changes that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. All other participants shared the opposite experience, explaining how mentorship opportunities were more accessible due to the convenience of connecting virtually and having the opportunity to expand the network of possible members with the barrier of location removed.

Once the initial themes emerged from the thematic analysis involving numerous revisions, a brief description was written for all 23 themes, describing the meaning behind each of the themes and clearly articulating the alignment of the critical codes found within each of the themes, including their connection to providing an answer to the two RQs. This chapter's results section provides a more in-depth explanation of each of the 23 themes across RQ1 and RQ2, beginning by indicating the connection each theme has to the interview questions that helped to generate valuable interview data, followed by supporting evidence of the themes and corresponding codes in the form of direct excerpts from participants responses during the interviews.

**Connection to Interview Questions for RQ1 Themes.** Table 3 outlines the connection between the 14 themes, including Themes 3 and 16, answer RQ1, and the interview questions that captured valuable insights into the lived experiences of study participants; interview questions are available in Appendix F.

**Table 3***Research Question 1 Themes and Associated Interview Questions*

Theme	Corresponding interview question
3. Advancing gender equality in hybrid	1d, 3, 4, 4a, 4b, 5, 4c, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 13
4. Leak in the pipeline of female leaders in hybrid	1d, 2, 3, 4b, 5, 6, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 12, 13
5. Heightened strain for working mothers balancing work–life in hybrid	2, 3, 5, 6, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 13
6. Personal and equity obstacles for female leaders in hybrid	2, 3, 4b, 5, 6, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 9, 10, 12, 13
7. Career advancement obstacles and decreased serendipitous opportunities for aspiring female leaders in hybrid	2, 3, 4b, 5, 6, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 9, 10, 12, 13
8. Risk of emerging exclusive subcultures and team disunity in hybrid	2, 3, 4b, 5, 6, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 9, 10, 13
9. Rise in female leaders experiencing mental health struggles in hybrid	2, 3, 4b, 5, 6, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 9, 10, 13
10. Need for female leaders to modify their approach to establishing trust in hybrid	2, 3, 4b, 5, 6, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 9, 10, 13
11. Prioritization of mental health through individualized self-care and work–life balance in hybrid	3, 4, 4b, 6a, 6b, 7, 7a, 7b, 8, 9, 10, 11a, 11b, 13
12. Purpose-driven career growth and intentional cultivation of serendipitous opportunities in hybrid	4, 4b, 6a, 6b, 7, 7a, 7b, 9, 10, 13
13. Technology empowerment in hybrid	3, 4, 4b, 6a, 6b, 7, 7a, 7b, 9, 10, 11a, 12, 13
14. Purposeful creation of unified teams in hybrid	4, 4b, 6a, 6b, 7, 7a, 7b, 9, 10, 11, 11a, 11b, 12, 13
15. Embracing feminine leadership traits, soft skills, and authenticity in hybrid	1d, 2, 4, 6a, 6b, 7, 7a, 7b, 8, 9, 11, 11a, 11b, 13
16. Increased access to mentors and support networks in hybrid	2, 3, 4, 6a, 6b, 7, 7a, 7b, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13

**RQ1 Themes, Code Framework, and Interview Excerpts.** Table 4 identifies the critical code framework for each of the 14 themes, consisting of a total of 30 codes representing findings related to RQ1, including insights related to the lived experience of female leaders transitioning from leading in a traditional workplace to a hybrid workplace model and the new barriers and opportunities they experienced. In addition to connecting the themes and critical codes, supporting evidence is provided in the form of direct

excerpts from participants' responses during the interviews that captured valuable insights into the lived experiences of study participants.

**Table 4***Research Question 1 Themes, Code Framework, and Interview Excerpts*

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
Theme 3: Advancing Gender Equality in Hybrid	Gender Inequality in the Workplace	<p>Participant 4 said, “We currently have a roadmap, this just even a couple of months ago, to demonstrate as the partnership grows, how many years it’ll take us to reach that parity. So, we do have a roadmap. We are very actively and aware of the imbalance, but it’s something that we are working towards.”</p> <p>In discussing gender inequality, Participant 16 shared her belief that the glass ceiling still exists and is not completely gone, explaining how “Women may be given more opportunity because of diversity and inclusion initiatives, but the glass ceiling’s not completely gone. It’s all good so long as everything’s good, but when something’s a challenge, you still get some of the old rhetoric around, ‘Well, she’s acting like a girl’...I’m allowed to have an opinion and won’t approach something like you do. And I’d say the older regime, the white male-dominated kind of scenario, isn’t quite as accepting of that as they’d like to think they are. Maybe the next generation will see young men realizing that this equality isn’t quite as equal as people would like to think it is.”</p> <p>“I would say it’s very important. This traditionally had been more male-dominated, at least at the higher levels, certainly for many years, probably the last 20 or 30 years. Many women have been coming into the profession, but it is not at the highest levels, not at the partnership roles. And even sometimes, there weren’t many women in senior leadership roles” (Participant 14).</p>
	Intentional Gender Equality Strategies, Programs, and Initiatives	<p>Participant 6 shares an example involving the creation of a “women’s network team, where it’s part of a corporate effort to make sure that we are supporting all the women at our organization to live, learn, and lead to their full potential, so because they might work on other teams and in other areas, just to make sure that we as a whole achieve our goals.”</p> <p>Participant 10 provided an example of supporting gender equality in the workplace explaining how her company strives to embrace “inclusivity, where making everybody feel comfortable that being a working mom and having to leave because you have to take someone to the doctor, or someone just threw up at school. All those things are sort of embraced as opposed to something that I think if I look back 15, 20 years ago. You would be kind of like, oh no. How am I going to deal with this?”</p> <p>“One of the aspects of DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] that we have been able to move the needle on more than other aspects, unfortunately, a lot of it is centered on women in tech being such a tech driven company” (Participant 11).</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
	Prioritizing Gender Equality in Hybrid	<p>“We have a huge diversity, equity, and inclusion mandate in our practice, and I think because I do a lot of hiring, our team is predominantly women. I was at another firm before and remember looking at the stats. It is incredible to see the correlation between having women in leadership roles, especially women who have part of their role in recruiting and hiring because you see so many more females like them senior managers and leaders” (Participant 9).</p> <p>Prioritizing gender equality in the workplace, according to Participant 18, is “Extremely important. I know our company takes it very seriously. It’s ironic that we’re speaking today because we just did a refresher on inclusion, diversity, and gender facts. We did that course today.”</p> <p>“The company overall has mandates that we need to get to a level of gender equality, and then it gets broken down by teams and by departments, and so it is absolutely a priority, it is something the company is working towards, there are receptacles that we look at the results, we dissect the results, we build the action plans where we have opportunities to achieve the results” (Participant 6).</p>
Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid	Leak in the Pipeline of Female Talent	<p>Participant 17 shared a personal experience of witnessing a leak in the pipeline of female leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic, explaining how, within her organization, “we had one woman who was up for partner that year and asked to remove herself from the partnership. She has four children, they were all very young, and she said, you know what, with the pandemic, and then going through this process of even preparing for the interviews, she was not willing to do it, so she went down to 4 days and asked to defer for a year. The next year, I think she had realized that she kind of liked her new pace, she has not wanted to go back into that route, she’s kind of taken a different route, still has a very high role, but she’s not wanting to move up anymore, she said maybe after the kids are older, but she said the pandemic really taught her that there’s things that she needs to be closer to home to do... We have not had any men come in with the same example, all of them went through, so I do think it’s a little bit more common for women to take on that responsibility, maybe a little heavier.”</p> <p>Participant 1 discussed programs they have in place to support female leaders and strengthen the pipeline, saying “We still have some of the challenges where, as you go more senior in leadership type roles, we have fewer and fewer women... So we are working very hard to try to improve that... with programs in place to improve the pipeline.”</p> <p>“I also find that the number of employees that I have that are looking to move up has severely diminished prior to the pandemic. More people are looking for work–life balance and not necessarily leadership positions” (Participant 2).</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid	Obstacles and Perceptions Working Mothers Encounter	<p>“There are more nuanced, softer things that we still all have to work on, whether that be women who are still thinking and making difficult decisions such as asking themselves questions such as, ‘Do I want to get pregnant or I want to get promoted first?’” (Participant 6).</p>
		<p>“I think I had more perspective on that, maybe compared to some of my male partners. I would say it was definitely a challenge. I think the hardest part, probably as a female leader, was watching some of my female staff members struggle with work-life balance, particularly those who have children at home; they struggled with trying to work and be everything to everybody. I watched one of my staff that was directly reporting to me really, really struggled and actually ended up having a mental health breakdown through it” (Participant 14).</p>
		<p>“We have another employee, a senior manager, who is going to make an offer of partnership very soon and in a similar situation, with small, very small children, very young. And I see her having to make that same kind of really, really challenging decisions, and I think it will be interesting to see how it plays out because, to this point, the people that have made it to the level that I’ve made it to, a partner level, we’ve done it through pure sacrifice” (Participant 14).</p>
		<p>“I would say, I was very clear upfront, that the role of parent was different than that of mother and father. I don’t know if I’m saying that right. But, what I see, over and over again, I personally do not experience because I had these conversations with my husband very early on. But a lot of female lawyers I know also have the lion’s share. They take the role at home as if they were a parent, like a parent from the 1950s” (Participant 12).</p>
	Parenthood Penalty	<p>“Yeah, because I think that in the one big shift, I have seen over the last 20 years is that men are demanding, or maybe fathers are demanding the same things as mothers. I see that a lot of men are willing to have a life outside of work and want to have that balance” (Participant 10).</p>
		<p>“Sometimes you feel bad saying it, but it’s a reality that there’s this male viewpoint that you can’t be as effective as a leader if you are a woman who has kids or other caregiving responsibilities. From my experience over the years, when I do look back, I have seen that a lot of the women leaders that made it to executive level, did not have kids. You find that kind of interesting, too, because it’s just unfortunate. It tells us again why we have so far to go when hybrid and remote work can actually help. You don’t have a person just sitting there, just taking care of their kids; it’s just that they saved 3 hours of commuting or something else. There’s still this lack of understanding of the success that can happen. And I think as more studies come out. Hopefully, we see that we find those successful things. Whether it’s conscious or unconscious, this bias towards</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		<p>women, particularly those that have caregiving responsibilities, aren't going to be able to be as successful" (Participant 13).</p> <p>Participant 5 provided further insight into the experience of female leaders transitioning to leading in a hybrid workplace model during a significant amount of change and uncertainty by saying, "What's difficult is the volume; what's difficult is nothing changed for us, it just became more, it became different, it became non-stop, it became where every now and then, you could go behind stage and you could take a breath, now you're always on stage, everything is exposed, and that means your kids are running in or your dog is freaking out, and you're trying to hold it together, but nothing changes, so the workload as a mother has just quadrupled...It just increased exponentially."</p> <p>Participant 8 clearly captured the feeling expressed by many participants by saying, "The whole idea that women have it all, like a superwoman who can balance everything, that's not really fair at all."</p> <p>"Yeah, so I would say I think kind of going back to where we had flexibility before, and as a female leader, I understand that's required for people that have children and you know, many women have other responsibilities outside of work, not just children, but just in the home and other things going on" (Participant 14).</p>
<p>Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid</p>	<p>Out-of-Sight, Out-of-Mind Dilemma</p>	<p>Participant 12 explains, "Being out in the world. We used to network by going to galas and lunches, and now we network in different ways...There's just not quite as many of those anymore. I think part of the unintended consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic is that we filled in all those hours with other things. Now there's no free time or extra time. No extra time for those events, types of networking, or social events." Participant 12 believes that "generally networking is still better in person," often resulting in opportunities for synergistically meeting with potential clients or other individuals who have the potential to become part of your network and for example, connect you with knowledge and prospective clients.</p> <p>Participant 14 explained how based on her experience advancing to a partnership level in her generation, "We haven't advanced to partnership levels with the benefits of flexibility, but the next generation is saying no to the traditional demanding partnership track expectations and pressures. The next generation wants flexibility and other ways of working, and many choose not to pursue partnership career aspirations. So, it will be interesting to see how we manage through that as a firm because it has been an interesting challenge," this is an issue that several study participants expressed that have a partnership track model.</p> <p>Participant 6 said, "You will just naturally miss out from conversations, from discussions, it is so easy to be walking and stop to talk to the person you visually see versus to think to yourself, 'Well I'm going to ping so and so,' and yet I don't want to ping that</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		<p>person because I might be distracting them, they might be in a meeting. Therefore, I am just going to wait to tell you, and then I might remember to share the information with you. And so, there's a balance, and I think we're all going to work our way and find our way through it."</p>
		<p>According to Participant 3, "Running into people is a thing of the past, hallway conversation, and it doesn't happen anymore."</p>
	<p>Personal Brand Equity Obstacles</p>	<p>Participant 6 discussed the importance of female leaders, particularly those seeing career growth opportunities, to ensure that they raise their personal brand equity by making an effort to go into the office and to follow the following framework called "PIE, which stands for performance, image, and exposure." When looking at exposure, Participant 6 said, "Exposure is important in building personal brand equity. Are you exposed to the people who, in that moment, will be making a decision about your future, and what is your action plan to get in front of them?"</p>
		<p>"As you get exposure, you get insight, you get insight to thinking, you uncover opportunities, you uncover things that are happening that could impact you...For example, if you're at the coffee room or 'water cooler' and you're talking about sustainability and you all of a sudden uncover there's a corporate program that already exists through a conversation, you might then go pursue it in volunteer and get exposure to a leader who will then maybe have a say" (Participant 6).</p>
		<p>"...build that critical mass where people are seeing you have interesting things to say and they can reach out to you for X, Y, Z. Almost like build your own little personal brand on the internal Slack channels" (Participant 11).</p>
		<p>"I think it just goes back to that visibility. And just making sure that you're grooming your personal brand in an authentic way, but making sure that you add the goal of increasing visibility as an objective on your to-do list of, Have I intentionally connected outside of the people I usually talk with? Or have I made my name be seen on Slack somehow" (Participant 11).</p>
<p>Theme 7: Career Advancement Obstacles and Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Aspiring Female Leaders in Hybrid</p>	<p>Career Journey Obstacles</p>	<p>"And I have a lot of women I work with who say things like, 'But how do you have time to bake your kid's birthday cakes?' And my answer is, I don't. You can't do both things...There's no, having your cake and eating it too" (Participant 12).</p> <p>When discussing career obstacles Participant 13 spoke about the challenges associated with a lack of networking in the remote or hybrid model. "I think over the last several years, there's been an impact on how to socialize and how to network. As much as there's all kinds of advice on 'How to network and how to grow your career,' I don't really think kids are taught how to effectively network. My daughter's a good example. She finished university last</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		<p>year and has her first job, and it started 100% remote. And you're not really getting to meet people. It's your first real full-time role and it's not easy to navigate. So that's where, to me, a hybrid model allows for at least meeting people initially, creating connections because there is a different vibration and a different energy being in-person in a room. It takes a bit more energy and intention to kind of create that kind of connection online, but it is possible because I think I can still get beautiful connections; I can see people's light, and I can see if they're bored out of their minds. You can see some cues, it's just a little different" (Participant 13).</p>
<p>Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid</p>	<p>Limited Serendipitous Career Growth Opportunities</p> <p>Formation of Exclusive Sub- Cultures and Department Silos</p>	<p>"And then even if you don't have great space, get creative, take a walk around the block, sit in the cafeteria in a corner with someone, and then use interstitial time well (i.e., the time before and after an event/meeting), like lunchtime if you have a half-hour break, sometimes just getting to learn the office. I'll just walk in circles; I'll just walk around it, and I'll bump into someone. Try to create the serendipity. Don't just wait for it to happen. Make yourself...Put yourself into situations" (Participant 8) that have the potential to create opportunities or valuable exchanges.</p> <p>"And then they have a connection with other people that are in the office. You have that in-person serendipity or serendipitous moments as well. I think there's value in all of it, but certain tasks I don't necessarily know. I think human beings are extremely adaptable and we can figure it out" (Participant 5).</p> <p>Participant 1 spoke about the importance of being proactive and creating your own serendipitous opportunities, saying "New opportunities? I think because we've become much more comfortable in this digital world, I think as much as we naturally network very well in person, having the ability to reach out to someone who's in an elevated role within the organization and schedule a 15-minute zoom or, I'm just looking at opportunities for career growth."</p> <p>Participant 2 said, "I call it high school. So, there are some cliques. From people who were just comfortable always doing the same thing, I would categorize them mostly as employees who are not good with change. The ones that had been with the company for a long time and didn't like change or whatnot; they stuck together and did not necessarily integrate themselves. And then there are the newer employees that are open to and run with all sorts of changes."</p> <p>"...employee clicks..." (Participant 1).</p> <p>"They pursue projects, they win work, team executes it for the most part. I would argue that that hasn't changed in COVID or through hybrid working, and I think ultimately there's greater disconnect with staff just because you don't have that exposure to that particular partner in that way, or you're not as physically present around them" (Participant 4).</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
	Generational Differences	<p>“I find even socially with that. It’s interesting. If you plan with people like Generation X or Boomers, they’re going to show up at that party. They’re going to probably arrive 10 minutes after the start time because that’s their socially acceptable kind of thing. But these younger generations, they might just not come at all because maybe they don’t feel like it” (Participant 3). “I’m the boss; you agreed to this plan; you helped make this plan; why are you not here? The Generation X employee, she was there 10 minutes early, and then we walked there and started getting some texts that were like, ‘Do they have coffee at the meeting,’ and I’m like, ‘I forgot that some of these people have never gone to a real-life conference before because of their COVID experiences.’ They don’t even know this” (Participant 3).</p> <p>“Honestly, a lot of the younger individuals in the workplace, have kind of shook our thinking. Because if I’ve been in the workforce, it’s always, you work the hours that you’re expected to work to get the project done. And now some of my younger employees are just like, ‘Nope, I’m working 9:00 to 5:00 and if it’s not done, it’ll be tomorrow.’ So, it is a very different...It’s a shift in thinking” (Participant 2).</p> <p>“And they’d come back in however many days and look at it and no one to talk to about it and then go back home. Where if you’ve got people milling about, that works well, but what doesn’t work well and makes everyone angry is when you have people at their desks on Zoom meetings while working in the office. Employees begin to feel like ‘Why did I come in today?’” (Participant 2).</p>
	Team Cohesion and Unity Obstacles	<p>“As a new employee, I find it’s just harder to get to know people and develop relationships with them. I don’t think it as a female or a male thing. I think it’s just new employees do better when” (Participant 8) they can meet colleagues for the first time in person.</p> <p>“If we are in a virtual world and we’re not having that meeting, something that could get lost in translation by communicating with an electronic ‘ping’ message that says, ‘Do A, B, and C,’ and the person could be missing the why we’re doing A, B, and C. So, you have to change, you have to think about the things that were important in that world so that you translate into the virtual world and understanding that ping message cannot convey what a conversation can. For example, you could say, ‘Hey, we’re going to have a meeting, we’re going to talk about the next project. It’s very easy to ping; please go do A, B, and C’” (Participant 6).</p> <p>“I think sometimes it’s easier to get distracted in a hybrid workplace, it is easy to be in a meeting and to be multi-tasking, and so you will show up differently than you would not be doing that level of multitasking if you were sitting in front of somebody and you would therefore show up differently. That could affect men. That could affect women. I’ve heard people say things like, oh, I put that in the background, and I’m chopping vegetables. Again, you would never</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		do that. Maybe it's the savings of time, maybe you're showing up as less engaged" (Participant 6).
Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid	Mental Health Struggles	<p>"I think we focused a lot more on the craft of what we do, but what we lost candidly speaking, during that period of time, we lost a bit of the why we do what we do" (Participant 1).</p> <p>"If anyone actually got COVID, I would text them or call them and check how they were doing, which didn't happen for a while. People didn't really get sick until there were vaccines for the most part. And then also we kind of had an informal list of people to watch out for. We had some people that were lived alone. You'd see them and their cat in the same place every single day, no one else going through. Their leader to check in on them and just have chats, and we keep an eye on them. We also had people that have four kids and a dog. They're also going crazy in those schools" (Participant 8).</p>
		<p>"One young woman as an example, she had some mental health issues. I ended up trying to help her get her...I got her support...She was ready to quit because she was so stressed out and then I had a couple other incidents where people were talking to me because I happened to be approachable, and I'd heard someone say, 'you're kind of a soft shoulder to cry on'..." (Participant 16).</p>
		<p>"We'll do whatever it takes to make sure our employees are healthy, and I think that there was a really big emphasis on mental well-being the first time it happened" (Participant 7).</p>
	Work-Life Obstacles	<p>"We received feedback through engagement and other surveys that people felt like they constantly had to be "on", and as a result, their work-life balance went completely out of whack. We realized that because they were home and we were always meeting, we were always talking to people that they wouldn't stop working" (Participant 8).</p>
		<p>"What's difficult is the volume, what's difficult is nothing changed for us, it just became more, it became different, it became non-stop, it became where every now and then, you could go behind stage and you could take a breath, now you're always on stage. Everything is exposed, and that means your kids are running in or your dog is freaking out or whatever, and you're trying to hold it together, but nothing changes, so the workload just quadrupled or just... It just increased exponentially" (Participant 5).</p>
		<p>"Like, when I'm working 12 hours straight, so bring me my lunch in the middle of the meeting, because he also can work from home and freelance. I also get support because of hybrid working, even without children, from my partner. But I didn't...For my specific life haven't, didn't really change that much. I never had the freedom of multitasking, doing laundry while working or baking bread over COVID" (Participant 4).</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
Theme 10: Need for Female Leaders to Modify Their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid	Adaptation of Performance and Productivity Measurements for Hybrid	<p>“My management style was still very base centered on personal relationships, knowing your team, trusting them, them trusting you by having open, transparent conversations... In terms of this model now, as long as I know my team, I understand my team, and I can trust my team to manage their time, manage their responsibilities, and get the job done, then I am quite flexible in how it gets done” (Participant 1).</p>
		<p>“The other thing I’d say is critically better in person is honestly one-to-one manager, and direct report meetings, especially if there’s a more sensitive topic. For example, if it’s a performance review, or a salary conversation, those types of conversations I just find to be so much better in person because you can read the room and read the body language a lot better” (Participant 7).</p>
		<p>“In the hybrid environment, it adds another layer of complexity because it’s like, is 3 days a week in the office, good for them or not good for them? Is hybrid good for them or not good for them? Do you need to push them to come in a little bit more? Because you can see how their performance improves when they’re in the office. So yeah, it just, it layers on the importance of situational leadership” (Participant 10).</p>
	Collaboration and Engagement Obstacles	<p>“It’s an issue of trust and knowing who your team is. Get to know them better, get to know them as human beings and it’ll be a lot easier to understand what they’re going through. Right? And then we don’t take it as personally. If I know that you are struggling with something that I might not have known before, now I do. And now I can be like, oh, okay, this isn’t them being lazy. Or thinking it has something to do with me. Now I can stop, and I can say, ‘Is everything okay? Do you need my support anywhere?’” (Participant 5).</p> <p>When discussing engagement and opportunities for female leaders Participant 4 said “I think that if in short, it’s about that people are willing to take a risk with men. As an example, if a man demonstrates confidence and that there’s somehow people allow themselves to say, he’ll push through, he’ll succeed, and he’s capable even without direct, or even without showing direct experience in that. While, women, the conversation seems to be, well, she hasn’t demonstrated enough experience showing that. In my mind, there’s a greater willingness to take a risk on an individual when they’re male versus sometimes women must prove themselves into their roles.”</p> <p>“We still do meet quite a bit on screen, but when it’s things like strategy sessions, we’re meeting in person, anything like that where we need that collaboration and that putting our heads together, we do in-person for sure. And same with our management team too. We do a lot of meetings virtually just because of the convenience. But then there’s times when it’s like, okay, no, we’ve got specific training or we’ve got specific things that we want collaboration on, and we ask the team to meet in-person on those things” (Participant 14).</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
Theme 11: Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work–Life Balance in Hybrid	Mental Health and Well- Being	“The biggest difference was the mental health aspect that I was noticing leading the team. I felt like previously in-office, for the most part, everyone showed up to work to do a good job in a relatively good mood. And it felt like for the most part, it felt healthy from a mental well-being perspective” (Participant 7).
		“It actually worked out really well because then leaders opened up to, asking the question ‘How do we bring more connection in, and also how do we increase support?’ As much as it was tough, in some cases, you could see who the leadership, even amongst a team, were the ones that had different skill sets in empathy like who had empathy? Who had compassion, who focused on the well-being of employees versus numbers, so kind of fascinating” (Participant 13).
		“And it gave us a common language to speak about mental health. And then within that period, I don’t remember when I think it was Christmas 2021, we realized that it was just too much communication” (Participant 8).
	Work–Life Balance by Leveraging Flexibility	“So I think there’s a renewed sense of setting boundaries. When we were in the office in the traditional model, it’s easier to turn it off, if you will, because you can leave the work at the office and then come home. I think during COVID, some of those lines got blurred, and some individuals took advantage” (Participant 2).
	“I was on this hamster wheel, and I kept thinking I needed boundaries between my work life, my home life, my personal life...” (Participant 5).	
	“But there is still so much more increased flexibility that it’s more attractive for certain women. Candidly speaking when I entered the role 6, 7 years ago, I was the outside of the box, because I said I would happily take on this type of step-up leadership-style role” (Participant 1).	
	Participant 1 before COVID-19 had negotiated working remotely and, in a hybrid, compacity, she expressed how much she enjoys where she lives from a work-life balance perspective and would never want to change this flexible operating structure. “I’m not moving, I am putting a line in the sand. I’m fine with traveling, I’m fine with hotels but I am physically not moving because for me support wherever I am looks like this. I would never have to have that conversation today. It would just be assumed, well yeah no you can do your job like that. But I had to fight for it 6 years ago” (Participant 1).	
Theme 12: Purpose- Driven Career Growth and Intentional	Intentional Creation of Serendipitous Growth Opportunities	“Being out in the world. We used to network by going to galas and lunches, and now we network in different ways...There’s just not quite as many of those anymore. I think part of the unintended consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic is that we filled in all those hours with other things. Now there’s no free time or extra time, no

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid		<p>free time. Still, extra time for those events, types of networking, or social events” (Participant 12). Participant 12 believes that “generally networking is still better in person,” often resulting in synergistically meeting with potential clients or other individuals who have the potential to become part of your network and connect you with knowledge and prospective clients.</p>
		<p>“I do find in a remote environment, it’s less natural, because when you’re in the office, those coffee conversations or those people interactions occur naturally versus now you have to seek them out a lot more and it can sometimes feel like it’s more effort” (Participant 2).</p>
		<p>Participant 8 said, “I used to try to intentionally bump into the senior person that I wanted to notice me. If you’re in a hierarchical environment and need an excuse to talk to someone, you can watch your VP, your GM, or President and say, ‘okay, well, do they have a certain habit of always eating lunch at noon in this cafeteria?’ You can circumvent a little bit of the politics and the hierarchy by just being in the same place as decision-makers...”</p>
	Purpose-Driven Self-Reflection	<p>Participant 14 explained how based on her experience advancing to a partnership level in her generation, “We haven’t advanced to partnership levels with the benefits of flexibility, but the next generation is saying no to the traditional demanding partnership track expectations and pressures. The next generation wants flexibility and other ways of working, and many choose not to pursue partnership career aspirations. So, it’ll be interesting to see how we manage through that as a firm because it has been an interesting challenge,” an issue that several study participants expressed.</p>
		<p>Participant 6 explained that to be promoted, female leaders must “One, get clear on what you want, get clear on who the stakeholders are who will get you there, and then two, get clear on your action plan. We use a framework called PIE, which stands for performance, image, and exposure,” with the image and exposure being both related to personal brand equity.</p>
		<p>“So much of it is creating an environment where people are excited and happy and fulfilled and feel like they’re aligned to the purpose of the organization. The structure of how that work gets done shouldn’t really matter, the location. But this is newer” (Participant 13).</p>
Theme 13: Technology Empowerment in Hybrid	Technology Empowering Working from Home	<p>“It was actually pretty agile and kind of immediate. I remember when a couple weeks leading into the pandemic when we started seeing some of the mandates from government, our company already had in place technology and technology for staff in terms of things like laptop computer and having servers” (Participant 4) becoming a priority for business continuity.</p>
		<p>“I think we would have a lift in productivity, in cost savings, and ideation if we were in person more. I do think that there would be a</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		benefit, but if all the great people that work for us now would come in person. If you could rewind the clock to before hybrid and we were all in person, I think we would be better at solving problems quickly because that's done well in person" (Participant 8).
		"We have a lot of technology that supports hybrids" (Participant 11).
	Technology Supporting Collaboration and Engagement	<p>"We could share screens very easy; we can be working on the exact same document together in some ways, almost more efficiently in a virtual world than if we were sitting together. I can show you how to do something on Excel together virtually" (Participant 6).</p> <p>"There are different tools that you use to collaborate, I think it's just, you want to make sure that the women are getting a chance to participate, to engage, and to be recognized for what they're bringing forward. It's making sure that you have both the tools but also the practices in place to make that happen" (Participant 6).</p>
		<p>"It's because we have studios we always work with other cities and that, so we always had to have technology to be able to collaborate. The idea of collaborating with Calgary as an example, or from 15 different houses is the same thing in terms of the technology and how our servers were set up. It was actually pretty seamless on our end, and we were very lucky in that way" (Participant 4).</p>
Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid	Culture of Unity in Hybrid	<p>"This week we're going to be off; we're going to be doing a wide range of pre-designed activities and social events in the studio. And it's because we were trying to invigorate a sense of belonging and understanding of who our company is" (Participant 4).</p> <p>"It wasn't very different. The only difference I would think say is that even though we work across studios, I think we were doing it even more now and that's a by-product of really recognizing that we don't have to really live in the same cities and be in the same office to collaborate. And so, what that's allowed is exposure to more individuals, and that allows for more women to get exposed to different opportunities with partners, with projects, and I think that's of great benefit" (Participant 4).</p>
		<p>Hybrid better supports the creation of a strong culture in comparison to purely remote according the Participant 12 "I think that the people who were more remote and less connected with the firm could really see that gap for themselves, and I think that's probably why we had such high turnover during that time, there were just a lot of people who didn't feel connected or part of the team."</p>
	Humanization of the Hybrid Workplace	<p>"So we're going to get things wrong, but it was allowing that safe space for people to mess up and, but to be open and to listen, because, again, you had the murder of George Floyd and then, you had the horrific finding all of these murdered and missing indigenous children right after, and you felt like the whole world went upside down" (Participant 5).</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		<p>“They are bringing their whole selves to work and how do we respect that and work that into the employee experience? So that’s probably my biggest shift” (Participant 5).</p>
		<p>“But I just think it’s that human emotional connection that goes beyond, I’m here to do a job. I’ll be in a meeting, and someone will say, ‘I’m running down to Starbucks, who wants something?’ And it’s those moments where you’re recognize, ‘Oh my God, I would love an Americano.’ And it’s just small things like that, that it’s hard to translate into saying, ‘I like coming in person because sometimes someone buys me a coffee,’ that’s not it. It’s the connection” (Participant 15).</p>
		<p>“...recognizing every single person’s a human, everyone’s going through their own stuff. And sharing just as much about me as they’re sharing about themselves. I think it humanizes everything, and makes it so much more comfortable” (Participant 7).</p>
<p>Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid</p>	<p>Feminine Leadership Traits and Soft Skills</p>	<p>“I think it’s been an evolution. I think it’s been an evolution and that I find it really interesting because I’ve been talking about heart center cultures and human first for years, things that people would not ever chat about in an HR field or in the workplace. And I think that the pandemic provided an opportunity to look at this, but I think there’s this reversion back to the we got to get stuff done. We got to be productive and this like masculine energy in a way” (Participant 13).</p>
		<p>“That really changed a lot of the strategy around, you know, how we facilitate, how we connect people to skills that matter in this day and age. So, we need to reprioritize certain skills” (Participant 11).</p>
		<p>“...we train people to understand what is showing up intentionally, either like verbal cues or bodily cues more than you would in person naturally. Because you can’t see the whole body, so you almost have to say, like affirm or positive reinforcement more than you would in a regular in-person setting. So that was it at first” (Participant 11).</p>
		<p>“I think empathy is huge. I think sympathy is also huge and sometimes I’m sympathetic and maybe not like so much empathetic. But and I think it’s like a balancing act” (Participant 7).</p>
	<p>Self- Awareness and Emotional Intelligence</p>	<p>“I try to lead from a place of empathy” (Participant 8).</p> <p>“For me, I didn’t even know I was doing it, it’s kind of that awareness, I didn’t even know that I was impeding someone’s growth just by being there, but I was by not delegating and saying ‘It’s okay, don’t worry about it, your plate is full. I’ll do it’. But what I’m doing is I’m sending the message like; I don’t believe in you. You’re not capable. You can’t do this, I’m the only one who can do it” (Participant 5).</p>
<p>Theme 16: Increased</p>	<p>Knowledge Sharing</p>	<p>“And we’ve just found that it’s nearly impossible for them to start a new job out of school and sit at home. The young staff need that</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
Access to Mentors and Support Networks in Hybrid		<p>mentoring coaching, they need the training, supervision, all that stuff. So those roles, we've kind of said like, when you're starting out, your brand new, and in a student role, you can't work from home. It's just not going to work. So those roles are all in. And then because of that, of course that means other roles must be in a little bit too, because we need somebody to provide the coaching, the mentoring and all of that, and also like the leadership for our IT staff, our admin staff and everybody else" (Participant 14).</p>
		<p>"...knowledge sharing presentations, I find they're very effective online..." (Participant 3).</p> <p>"On a more formal basis, some of our newer partners or high potentials that are moving into partners, we have had a coach that they can have time with, especially as we start to identify gaps. We look at partner, like kind of a roll forward of 3 years so that we can help people identify gaps here as opposed to getting into the process and realizing they're not ready, whether that's behaviors or metrics or anything that it is. Starting this year, I've mentioned we've had restructure in a lot of our groups" (Participant 17) due to the lack of desire to strive for a partner position.</p>
	Mentorship and Support Networks	<p>"Could you, and those mentoring it is much easier post-COVID as I said I was the rare one who had a Zoom meetings pre-COVID. Now everyone has a Zoom meeting and it's so easy to make those quick touchpoints, build those connections, build out your network, so build out your brand as well" (Participant 1).</p> <p>"Career growth specifically. I do feel that in the past you'd be able to kind of move up into leadership positions, mentorship, sponsorship was more fluid than it is now in remote" (Participant 2).</p> <p>"I have heard from staff that I've naturally become kind of take on a mentorship role, specifically with a lot of females in the studio in general, just because I think they see themselves in me in that way, and I'm one of the more approachable leaders of our practice, and part of that is because I still see myself as an employee in many ways" (Participant 4).</p> <p>"When you think about some of the research I've been doing on mentoring, coaching, and sponsorship, and sponsorship is becoming such a bigger thing now, too. Where, is there someone championing you in the organization, and how do you find that person without seeming pushy? And which is silly because again, it's all these labels. It's like, just be you" (Participant 13).</p>

**Connection to Interview Questions for RQ2 Themes.** Table 5 outlines the connection between the nine themes, including Themes 1–2, and Themes 17–23, answer RQ2, and the interview questions that captured valuable insights into the lived experiences of study participants; interview questions are available in Appendix F.

**Table 5**

*Research Question 2 Themes and Associated Interview Questions*

Theme	Corresponding interview question
1. The future of work is hybrid for many knowledge workers.	3, 4, 4a, 4b, 4c, 6a, 6b, 12, 13
2. Adapting to a transformative and dynamic individualized hybrid workplace model	1c, 2, 3, 4, 4a, 4b, 4c, 6a, 6b, 9, 10, 12, 13
17. The benefits of taking an individualized leadership approach compatible with the complex and flexible nature of the hybrid workplace models	2, 3, 4c, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 8, 9, 10, 11, 11a, 11b, 12, 13
18. The benefits of being an adaptable leadership approach during times of change and uncertainty	2, 3, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 8, 9, 10, 11, 11a, 11b, 12, 13
19. The benefits of empowering employees and cultivating trust in a hybrid workplace model	2, 3, 4, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 8, 9, 10, 11, 11a, 11b, 12, 13
20. The benefits of consistent and transparent communication in a hybrid workplace model	2, 3, 4, 4b, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 8, 9, 10, 11, 11a, 11b, 12, 13
21. The benefits of team engagement and collaboration in the hybrid workplace model	2, 3, 4, 4c, 4b, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 8, 9, 10, 11, 11a, 11b, 12, 13
22. The benefits of a continuous learning, skills development, and growth mindset in the hybrid workplace model	2, 3, 4, 4c, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 8, 9, 10, 11, 11a, 11b, 12, 13
23. The benefits of embracing authenticity, intuition, and intentionality when leading in a hybrid workplace model	2, 3, 4, 4b, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 8, 9, 10, 11, 11a, 11b, 12, 13

**RQ2 Themes, Code Framework, and Interview Excerpts.** Table 6 identifies the critical code framework for each of the nine themes, consisting of a total of 22 codes for RQ2, including insights related to the lived experience of female leaders transitioning from leading in a traditional workplace to a hybrid workplace model and the benefits of applying a Situational Leadership® style. In addition to connecting the themes and critical codes, supporting evidence is provided in the form of direct excerpts from participants’

responses during the interviews that captured valuable insights into the lived experiences of study participants.

**Table 6***Research Question 2 Themes, Code Framework, and Interview Excerpts*

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
Theme 1: The Future of Work is Hybrid for Many Knowledge Workers	COVID-19 Pandemic the Impetus for Hybrid	<p>According to Participant 3, these changes that took place while working solely from home in a remote operating structure have made it “more difficult for employees to return to the office...many employees have in some cases moved away from the office, adopted dogs, among many other changes taking place between the 6th month and the 1 year time frame during the COVID-19 pandemic when people got lax, started getting second jobs, benefited from making more money at home due to reductions in commuting and childcare expenses in some cases, all of that kind of stuff that involved changing their lives.”</p> <p>“Now we have three locations since COVID. For me, that was a real, huge kind of unintended consequence of it. We had already started that concept that your teams may not all be with each other” (Participant 12) an operating approach that before COVID-19 some partners were unsure it would be success.</p> <p>“And I think that’s the piece where the women in the workplace, and especially moms in the workplace, can really come out of this transition post-COVID in a better place” (Participant 1).</p>
	Future of Work is Hybrid – New Normal	<p>When asked if the hybrid workplace will be the future, Participant 18 said, “Yeah, absolutely. It’s going to be the future. And I think being able to retain top talent and to go back to, you know, I was speaking to, about a colleague who probably wouldn’t have been able to have this company.”</p> <p>“So, I would say we’re still evolving, and we’re still learning what this hybrid office of the future will look like over the long term” (Participant 1).</p> <p>When discussing the hybrid workplace model as the new normal, Participant 5 said, “...and through that and really uncovering those deep seeded, well, that’s just how it’s done. Why and what else? How so say more, you know, and uncovering the archaic belief that that’s just how it’s always been done. Okay, that’s not the way it’s done anymore. And let’s uncover the belief around that and the chatter around that. That’s the leadership piece is so what’s making you feel that way? Why do you feel that way?”</p>
	Hybrid Offers the Best of Both Worlds	<p>“For other people, they felt like the collaboration they get in-person is different and better than when they are online, and so again, it’s about meeting the needs of different folks to make sure that everybody is as productive and as happy and as effective as they can be. And so that is where the hybrid model came in because it allowed us to have the best of both worlds” (Participant 6).</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		<p>“I do think, I think flexibility. I like people in the office too. It might be that old school. Like I, you know, I, when we have a day when a bunch of people are here because we have an activity, like there is a different energy” (Participant 17).</p>
		<p>“I think that there’s a lot about the human nature that they want to be with people, and I think it’s difficult to be in your home all the time, like just mentally, emotionally. I think that was a real struggle for a lot of people” (Participant 12).</p>
	Knowledge Workers	<p>When discussing the importance of knowledge workers having access to a flexible workplace, Participant 8 said, “The problem now is if I were to say, okay, that’s it, like we’re going to be strict, we’re all going to be in these dates, we’re always going to be together, I would lose my best people. And so that would probably undermine some of it, I don’t know how many of them.”</p> <p>Participant 3 believed that the hybrid workplace model is the new normal for knowledge workers; she said, “I think it absolutely and totally must because a hybrid workplace, the world is now open competition for knowledge workers. And that is something that I also learned about in science and research, which is, you know, how we say, people are disposable. You can find a new person.”</p>
Theme 2: Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model	Evolution of the Hybrid Workplace Models	<p>Both the workplace and leaders have evolved alongside the evolution of the workplace for example Participant 1 shared an example of how she has evolved saying “I’m probably much more accessible post-COVID than I would have been in the past. I think that would be one of the biggest evolutions of my leadership style.”</p> <p>Participant 4 shared a perspective many participants shared when she explained, “I think that it’s hard to swing back to where we were, and I don’t believe we should. I’m a supporter of hybrid working for a few reasons, but I think it comes with its own challenges and some benefits. I think it will remain; I’m unsure where we landed...I don’t think this is the final stop.”</p> <p>Participant 4 while discussing the transition to a hybrid model shared her perspective on the evolution of the flexible operating structure by saying “We are hybrid. When we kind of started talking about return to work or kind of midway through COVID, let’s say when we were start... Some people were coming into the studio, some weren’t. We wanted to adopt, or we thought we would land in a more hybrid, an entirely flexible solution where everyone can work anywhere.”</p> <p>Participant 8 provided an example of how on top of a flexible hybrid workplace model in place her organization having also offered flex days, she said “We gave people 10 flex days a year. So, in other words, they could say, like, I want to go away for a month. So that would be eight of their flex days, and they didn’t have to come in for a whole month. Or they could say, okay, want</p>
	Hybrid Workplace Model and Flexibility	

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		<p>a bunch of like extra-long weekends, and they could pick one day out, so they would only have to work one day.”</p> <p>Participant 3 discussed how flexibility works within she organization, sharing how all departments are different and providing an example of one department by saying “This is what we’ve done within people in culture, that every team has an anchor day, and then every team has a team agreement that they can then choose what they do.”</p> <p>“While we have printed, we’ve got guidelines and structure that mandates everybody, we’ve got the flexibility within that to enable the team and then the individual to achieve their needs” (Participant 6).</p>
<p>Theme 17: The Benefits of Taking an Individualized Leadership Approach Compatible with the Complex and Flexible Nature of the Hybrid Workplace Models</p>	<p>One-size-does-not-fit-all in Hybrid</p> <p>Employee-Centric Understanding</p>	<p>Participant 8 shares her experience recognizing that everyone is different when it comes to the level of flexibility wanted in a hybrid model by saying “And, of course no one wanted to go in. Why do you want to sit in a mask and Zoom all day, Zooming people across the hall? It didn't make any sense. So then when we were able to relax it, and you finally could go in normally, they just didn't want to go back.”</p> <p>Participant 4 provided an example of how one-size-does-not-fit-all in hybrid even within organizations across their different departments by saying “Some practices took on as an example, a mandated, you must come in Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Some businesses came in and said, you need to be two days a week in the office.”</p> <p>“All individuals on my team. Yeah. And then each team has a different set of two days. I think the idea is not to overcrowd the office” (Participant 7).</p> <p>“For the most part, flexibility, I think that was the message that we got. It wasn't going to be one-size-fits-all, and then still now we're still, tweaking things, depending on our teams” (Participant 18).</p> <p>“I have one staff member who, as I said, is Generation X; all her work is good. She arrives on time; she tells you what she's up to but getting her to do her work is another story. So, if I get an email where I'm cc'd, I have to write to her and say, 'Please respond to this email.' On teams because I just know if I don't do that it's never going to get done. So... And I hate it because that's micromanaging. Yeah, I think it's... I would say I use elements of it. Everyone's different. So, you must just work to their strengths” (Participant 3).</p> <p>“...as you transition to a hybrid workplace model, you need to make sure that your team transitions, that they're comfortable, that their needs are met and the needs of everybody are different, and so it was very personal and intentional to understand your needs</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		and understand how we as a company can address them” (Participant 6).
		“Definitely brainstorming better in-person versus...The challenge, and I’m sure you’ve encountered this, the challenge is on Zoom, you have certain personalities that are very comfortable” (Participant 1).
	Individualized Leadership Approach	“Yeah, so we usually bring situational leadership, and the quadrants and making sure that people are getting the direction that they need based on where they are in the quadrant. Based on the work that we do, it doesn’t matter, depending on the work that some people do, where you must physically be with somebody to show something, I can see how it really could matter” (Participant 6).
		According to Participant 8, this is of critical importance, particularly for those new employees who are joining a hybrid workplace model, where she explains how it is essential to “understand that humans behave differently and have different needs and roles of different needs.”
		“But if you show me results, you show me no headaches, honestly, I don’t care how you get the job done. Do what you need to do. And if that means you’re in the office 2 days a week and the rest you’re networking and training and working with your team, you do what you got to do” (Participant 1).
Theme 18: The Benefits of Being an Adaptable Leadership Approach During Times of Change and Uncertainty	Adaptable Leadership Approach	When leading in a hybrid workplace model, it is important to “recognize every single person’s a human, everyone’s going through their own stuff. And sharing just as much about me as like they’re sharing about themselves, I think, yeah, humanizes everything and makes it so much more comfortable. I think it’s also challenging with people who have a lot of personal demands in their lives, and they’re trying to figure out how to balance everything while also being a high performer. So having enough empathy or sympathy to set up those accommodations and support them, but also making sure like you’re delivering what you need to deliver is important” (Participant 7).
		“If you talk about the idea of maturing how we move into hybrid, you go from roles and mandates and days to understanding that humans behave differently and have different needs and roles of different needs” (Participant 8).
		“Say you have a senior person working under you who’s had 10 years of experience, and they just can’t find time in their day; you could ask them, ‘Hey, would it help you if we met once every 2 weeks instead of once every week? I could really use more time with the Junior Associate. I don’t want you to take that the wrong way, but I could see it benefiting us both.’ So again, yes, I think, especially for time reasons, situational leadership is super relevant.

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		<p>I think it goes back to how you would interact with them on a human level anyway. Don't put pressure on yourself as a leader to be the same with everyone because different people are going to need different sides of you and different aspects of you. So, yeah, I think it's still very relevant" (Participant 11).</p>
	<p>Navigating Change and Uncertainty</p>	<p>"I think it's like figuring out the right questions that you need to ask your employee to get to the root cause of why they're struggling or what could be done better to support them, was the biggest thing I had to learn and the biggest thing I had to adapt on" (Participant 7).</p> <p>Given the significant amount of change employees are experiencing transitioning to a hybrid workplace model, "from a people perspective, we also had leadership team calls every single day because I had to write these reports every single day and things really were changing at the beginning. We had town halls every single month. We had check-ins" (Participant 8).</p> <p>Participant 10 speaks also about the importance of managing her team through the transition to a hybrid workplace model during an extended time of change and uncertainty, but also the need to help clients navigate change. "It's hard. But I can see people that have a very different style, and it doesn't work for everybody, right? It's no different from relationship management with clients. Every client has a different need, and every team member is at a different stage in their career and needs different things" (Participant 10).</p>
<p>Theme 19: The Benefits of Empowering Employees and Cultivating Trust in a Hybrid Workplace Model</p>	<p>Empowering Employees</p>	<p>"I think it's different by employee. What I found is for high performing employees, there really is no difference between virtual and working from home because you can trust that they're going to get done what they need to get done. My challenge is more on employees who aren't performing at the level we'd want them to be performing at even before COVID-19. I think with the work from home model, it's hard to figure out why they aren't performing. It's hard to understand, if they checked out and are they just not putting in the hours or are they sitting there and not working or if they are stressed out, and they just don't know what to do or are they really trying and it's just not working?" (Participant 7).</p> <p>"In terms of this model now, if I know my team, I understand my team, and I can trust my team to manage their time, manage their responsibilities, and get the job done, then I am quite flexible in how it gets done. It's when we lose the trust, I lose faith in their ability to manage that on their own. That's where I come in and say, okay, now I'm going a little old school on you, this is how it must be done until you can prove otherwise" (Participant 1).</p> <p>"...empowering my team by removing myself, and it was again, it's an analogy that it's not the greatest, but you cut the brush back and then all of sudden different things emerge, and so one of the</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		strategies for me was stepping back and saying, you've got this, you don't...Having me in the room changes the room, so when the head of HR walks in, it changes the room and saying, 'Do I need to be there or can someone else be there?' That became a big strategy for me to say, 'Where do I need to be and where do I best serve? Where am I required?' Watching other people flourish because of getting out of my own way was incredible" (Participant 5).
	Nurturing a Culture of Trust	"I think leaders are still looking for some sort of quick fix to how they can adapt to leading in a hybrid workplace...They are searching for the 10 things they should be doing as a hybrid leader...I think people are over-thinking how different this operating model is...what we need to do is focus on humanizing the workplace more. For example, if you are having a bad day as a leader, that's okay. Just tell your team, I'm disheveled right now, and I am sorry, or whatever you feel comfortable saying. Right. That kind of vulnerability builds so much more trust than any sort of leadership framework would" (Participant 11).
		"I do feel like that trust, if you will, has improved in a hybrid model because at least you're having those face-to-face interactions and supplementing those relationships that you've, maybe, not had as close as you would have in traditional model beforehand. A lot of what we do is based on trust and I've got good trust with my employees. It is a little bit harder to establish trust with individuals that you haven't met because they got hired during the pandemic kind of thing" (Participant 2).
		"I think that's just like building trust. Making sure that what I've said to everybody, "Look, just drop sometime in my calendar, drop some time in my calendar.' And I actually have just sent a message, and I'm going to see if she replied. Yes, she did. So, I said to her, drop sometime in my calendar today. And she did at noon right after this. So that's what I'm trying to kind of encourage them to do is like, don't feel like it's got to be like, just if you want to talk to me call me. Like you can do that or just, yeah, stick 15 minutes, half an hour in my calendar and we'll chat. So yeah, but I think it, that just takes, that just takes time" (Participant 10).
	Performance Reviews in Hybrid	"If we still do annual performance reviews, we still have a very formal feedback process, but we had moved away from formal mid-years, we encourage them, we sent out information to help leaders create those opportunities and have those discussions, but we didn't ask for the formal employee doing a self-assessment and then the employees conduct their own assessment, and have a conversation between the employee and leader. We're putting that back in this year for the first time because we're finding that we almost need to create those opportunities to have discussions, and we've hired so many people now during the pandemic. A lot of the new employees have spent very little time in the office, I've never seen it when it was always full, so their reality is different, so how are we making sure we're connecting with them, and they feel

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		<p>comfortable to raise concerns? Because I think that's the biggest thing. They are doing well, that seems to be fine, but what about employees that are struggling? If no one's following up, then we seem to be getting to a point where...How do we help you? Our policies are starting to switch back to ensure leaders are reaching out to employees to understand how best to support them. We're asking people, right when a new hire starts to put in a monthly, even quarterly review, where you have specific meetings just to discuss career development, asking employees, 'Where do you want to go?' We also see a turn in interest in some roles, we've had employees, for example, some employees are saying, 'I don't want to be a partner,' where before, that was always the goal for most professionals coming into our company" (Participant 17).</p> <p>"We're also creating information sessions, almost, learning events where we're having panels with partners talking about why what they like about being a partner, so the only thing we seem to see as I'm rushing around and being busy..." (Participant 17).</p> <p>Participant 12 provided an example of decreased performance in a hybrid workplace model. "We have a bankruptcy lawyer who didn't come in for 3 years, and we had to say to him, you need to come in twice a week. We don't know who you are and nobody's sending you work at the office. You're complaining about how you're not getting a lot of great referrals from us. Nobody trusts you, and it's not about you. It's about the fact they don't know you. And there's nothing worse than saying to a client, 'Hey, I don't do this', but you get the exact same experience as if I were doing it. If you work with my colleague, and then it's a... No, it's not the exact same experience. So, because he joined us during COVID, and he was very independent of us. Nobody really knows him. And so, it has been more difficult, like we say all the time, when you join the firm, you need to network with the world, obviously, like with your network, but you need to network internally. The biggest producer of some of our lawyer's work is other lawyers at our law firm, not elsewhere" (Participant 12).</p> <p>"I don't think they see any difference. We have very, I would say, specific kind of framework around performance reviews and checking in with staff at our company, because of the size of the organization, has specific formal check-ins in addition to the informal things that team leaders should be doing or would naturally be doing in that way" (Participant 4).</p>
Theme 20: The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model	Consistent and Transparent Communication	Participant 2 believes that in a hybrid workplace model communication has been easier than in the traditional operating structure with less flexibility. "So outside of all my direct reports and the people in my world, it was easier to communicate on a regular basis. To give you some context when I say our partners, our estate and financial planners, our insurance sales consultants, our digital trainers, our, everyone who supports our organization getting them to in-person meetings was sometimes challenging,

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		<p>because they were stretched so thin then everything went virtual and their capacity went like this because they weren't on the road anymore, they weren't traveling" (Participant 2).</p> <p>"I think it opened more doors for women, because yes, we've brought back a lot of the in-person and even that in that hybrid mix" (Participant 2).</p> <p>The other thing that was an interesting observation through this was the shift in language, in really highlighting how language matters. When everyone was saying, return to work, we're all like, we never stopped. It's not a return to work, it's a return to office and so really, again, just paying attention to the language that was used around the terminology. And all of this is new, it's all emerging" (Participant 5).</p>
	Open Door Policy in Hybrid	<p>"I've always had an open-door policy. So, my team does tend to speak to me more often than I do have one-on-ones with all team members, whereas some of my colleagues only have certain team members" (Participant 2). When asked by the researcher how do you maintain an open-door policy while operating in a hybrid workplace model, Participant 2 said "You answer your phone, you answer your team" in a timely manner.</p> <p>"It was a lot of flexibility, so. And conversations about what works for people and not others and open and honesty. What I found was random though, I don't know if this happened to you during COVID or if maybe it was just because of HR, is that people were telling me their whole life story of their medical history because they were frightened" (Participant 3).</p> <p>Participant 6 believes it is important when establishing open communication seeing one another's faces even if it is virtually important, Participant 6 said "I think a lot of it is just about communicating and then I think video is amazing, so for us, video is always on, it is not an option, unless your video is broken, it is always on, because you need to be able to still see facial reactions and you need to be able to engage on a human level. I think it's just being really thoughtful about how we use virtual tools and which ones work for what, and making sure that if we are taking shortcuts, we're not losing what is important along the way" (Participant 6).</p>
Theme 21: The Benefits of Team Engagement and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace Model	Engagement and Collaboration in Distributed Teams	<p>"For other people, they felt like the collaboration they get in-person is different and better than when they are online, and so again, it's about meeting the needs of different folks to make sure that everybody is as productive and as happy and as effective as they can be. And so that is where the hybrid model came in because it allowed us to have the best of both worlds" (Participant 6).</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		<p>“As a new employee I find it’s just harder to get to know people and to really develop relationships with people. I don’t think it as a female or a male, I think it’s just new employees do better” (Participant 8).</p>
		<p>Participant 5 spoke of the importance of establishing an inclusive environment that supports employee engagement and collaboration. “I think the minimum standard we should aim for is that people feel welcome at work. If you’re just diversity, you’ve just checked a box inclusion you did it just means you invited someone to a party, but it doesn’t mean that when they show up, they’re going to feel welcome there. I think the minimum standard is feeling welcome. And that really highlighted for me how I could do better on.”</p>
	<p>Leveraging Technology for Collaboration in Hybrid</p>	<p>“I would say during COVID, we got very comfortable with initiating collaboration virtually, and so now we do it seamlessly, whereas I would say before COVID, you would probably want a personal interaction, you might walk over, you might want to meet somebody in-person and now we’re very comfortable bringing somebody you’ve never heard before, to say ‘Hi I’m so and so,’ and have a conversation, then off I go. In many ways, we have embraced the tools, COVID has forced us to embrace the tools which we now have, and so we collaborate better. It doesn’t matter that we’re not in there at the same time, it’s a non-event. We work seamlessly virtually, I would say” (Participant 6).</p>
		<p>Participant 6 spoke about leaders establishing norms in a hybrid workplace model to support more effective communications, saying “I think those are important things, and then I think it comes down to the norms of different companies, so companies will have everybody automatically on or off mute, when everyone is off mute people will connect and talk before the meeting start, and it doesn’t matter that they’re not in the room, and some will have where you have to raise your hand and you get called on. That creates a different kind of dynamic” and level of engagement.</p>
	<p>Softening of Formal Hierarchical Structures</p>	<p>Participant 4 discussed the importance of empowering teams to make decisions that make the most sense for their specific needs. “If project teams have decided that on Tuesdays everyone from a certain project comes in, the idea is to try to re-engage collaboration in a more meaningful way so that we are in a hybrid model” (Participant 4).</p>
		<p>Participant 11 shares an example of a grassroots initiative that was started by an employee to encourage other employees to come into the office more often. This employee does not hold a senior leadership position showing how the hybrid workplace model allows for a softening of formal hierarchical structures. “There is usually one influencer in the team, right? Well, there is this one guy who is in our engineering department who is such an influencer. He regularly posts on his own communication channel a</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
Theme 22: The Benefits of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and Growth Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model	Continuous Skills Development	message saying, ‘Hey, going in the office, Wednesday, Thursday, who wants to join me?’ And he’s created an entire movement around that in the engineering department because approximately 10 of them will go in together” (Participant 11). Leadership supported this grassroots initiative and “showcased that story on our company-wide Slack channel, so other departments could be inspired by this initiative” (Participant 11).
		Participant 1 spoke about the lost skills during the COVID-19 pandemic-related sales, given that many sales went through, in some cases, multiple years without socializing. Participant 1 said “We lost sales skills, which requires having conversations with clients, not all skills are best trained remotely.”
		“It’s incredibly important and it’s something that we focus on a ton, and we talk a lot about both at like a leadership level, but then also as we look at like employee groups and trainings that are out there. It’s like beyond like International Women’s Day, I feel like it’s a very central topic that we’re constantly talking about. And it’s sometimes on like trainings for skills. So sometimes upskilling, sometimes it’s like on bias training, it really varies, but I think there’s like so much support, so much talking about it and so much measurement going on to deliver it” (Participant 7).
		The transition to a hybrid workplace has influenced skill development, according to Participant 11 there is “a lot of the strategy around, how we facilitate, and how we connect people to skills that matter in this new normal, we have reprioritized certain skills.”
	Growth Mindset and Knowledge Sharing	One profession that emerged as being important for knowledge sharing in the growth of the employees was accounting, architecture, and law. In accounting, students are given opportunities to intern and benefit greatly from knowledge sharing by working closely with knowledgeable experts. “Another role we’re looking at is like the students because we bring a lot of students into our business as part of our kind of business model of growing CPA students. Students need to be with the people that they’re going to learn from; you’re going to get experience managing the staff and being that leader. I think for the most part, most of the partners started coming in more frequently into the office to support knowledge sharing and development of the CPA students and entry-level employees” (Participant 14).
		One example of knowledge sharing provided by Participant 8 to new employees within her organization is a speech she gives to inspire and make employees feel welcome, more confident, and supported within the organization. Participant 8 said she tells new employees joining the organization to “Keep two lists. One list of things I just don’t understand, like an acronym or a process, who does what? And then the second list of ideas and opportunities that you don’t see after three months. Only new people see these things

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		<p>that look weird, why does this process work this way, and why do we do this packaging this way and keep that list? Because the first list you just ask and your boss or your mentor or buddy must answer those questions. You just need to get that answered. The second list has a couple of nuggets in it that are golden. But like 80% of it, someone's going to tell you like it's a legal or an IT issue or French or whatever it is. And they're probably right. Yeah. But we've always done it that way, it is an interesting one because if they say that, then that's probably not a good reason to keep doing it. And then there might be 20% of the ideas that they're like, 'Oh, that's really interesting.' Later return to the other, the 80% list because what you thought was the opportunity may come to a different opportunity, but the question you saw was the right question. And you need to be in a culture where you can ask these questions. I used to give this speech to every new group. I would do onboarding with every single person who started in the office."</p> <p>During the COVID-19 pandemic, one participant spoke of her company supporting knowledge through the creation of a COVID-19 pandemic playbook. "I think everyone had to have some time to figure out, what they needed. So, we're lucky we had a team, just, our employee relations team just kind of moved into a COVID support unit for a couple of years. And they were very quick to start to share. We had a COVID playbook come out quickly that just really focused on, figure out what works for you and everything else will fall into place" (Participant 17).</p>
<p>Theme 23: The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model</p>	<p>Authentic and Empathetic Leadership</p>	<p>"What's really tough about COVID is like the mental health onslaught and the challenges people are going through, but then figuring out how you have that level of empathy but also getting what you need for the business. Figure out how you set up accommodations that work both for the employee and the business and that balance, something I find to be challenging" (Participant 7).</p> <p>"I think it's about knowing...It's understanding yourself and then understanding how you translate it into this world, so for example, I am all about moving things forward, one of the things that I sometimes I don't share enough of this context in it because I'm moving forward and in the world when we are all together when we're having a meeting together, it is very natural to say, Hey everybody, we are here together to achieve goal X, here's why we're going to achieve it that exists as a forum, and that naturally brings out the context" (Participant 6).</p> <p>"I think it just goes back to that visibility. And just making sure that you're grooming your personal brand in an authentic way, but making sure that you almost add it as an objective on your to-do list of, Have I either intentionally connected outside of the people I usually talk with?" (Participant 11).</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		<p>“I think for the first time in corporate history, we’re getting a more intimate look into people’s personal lives in the sense where like you, when would I have ever been in my boss’s house in previous lives, right? When would I have ever been in my Senior Vice President’s living room? Never. My CEO’s office? Never. My whatever Vice President’s backyard and pool and dog? Never. So, it’s a very kind of cool, it’s almost like a breaking of the fourth wall” (Participant 15).</p>
		<p>“I think it has led to more of a humanization or personalization of leadership and that ability to really make strong connections with employees and hopefully better the firm, better the employees, and kind of provide those deep development and learning opportunities. You must be more intentional about your career and what you’re doing. And I would say, yeah, I would fully agree with that. And I think that’s something that I keep trying to coach my team on is those little things, like when you’re on a meeting with a client and turning a camera on so that you’re making that connection with them, because we have a lot of the younger generation employees like they don’t want to turn their camera on” (Participant 14).</p>
	<p>Embracing Intuition and Intentionality</p>	<p>Participant 13 spoke about the importance of being intentional about finding a support network to raise your profile and lead effectively in a hybrid workplace model. “Yeah, it’s interesting because that whole thing about visibility comes up, doesn’t it? And so, for me, a lot of it is creating those relationships. When you think about some of the research I’ve been doing on mentoring, coaching, and sponsorship, and sponsorship is becoming such a bigger thing now, too. Where, is there someone championing you in the organization, and how do you find that person without seeming pushy? And which is silly because again, it’s all these labels. It’s like, just be you. But I think that building the connections and relationships is critical. And so, hybrid, remote, you can do that by ideally having opportunities to have one-on-one conversations with people and figuring out, here’s the thing. We also must start with why. Like, what is it we want as an individual?” (Participant 13).</p>
		<p>“They don’t want to make those personal connections. It’s being intentional about maybe you don’t always turn your camera on, but maybe it’s certain key client meetings or key meetings with your manager, say, it’s an annual review or something, where you really want to shine and show your presence in that. I think that intentionality, I think, is important in this hybrid environment, for sure” (Participant 14).</p>
		<p>“You must be much more intentional about what you’re discussing. The serendipitous discoveries don’t happen, as easily on Zoom I find, but I wouldn’t want to return to 5 days in office either. I appreciate having the flexibility in my schedule and I appreciate</p>

Theme	Code	Interview excerpt
		being able to make time to easily speak to people, not even in the company” (Participant 8).
		“It’s not something that we speak about, but I understand the concept. I think that when you work for organizations that are quite large, it’s hard to feel like you are working towards a common goal or interest or feel that your part of the culture. For us, the words we use is, how are we able to bring the culture of our office and our organization to staff in a more meaningful way? And I think part of that is tough and that is a tough aspect to replicate over a hybrid work solution. because to us, culture is created in an office environment, right?” (Participant 4).

Following thematic data analysis, I use Microsoft Excel, Word, and OneNote to analyze the data, documenting the thematic hierarchies within the data. Three thematic maps illustrate the study findings. The first, Figure 8, visually presents the 14 themes that answer RQ1, and the second, Figure 9, illustrates the nine themes that answer RQ2. Data that emerged through a thematic analysis in response to RQ1 included a total of 14 themes, with one hybrid workplace model-related theme, seven barriers-related themes, and six opportunities-related themes female leaders experienced transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model (as shown in Figure 8). The following provides a high-level description of the nine themes associated with RQ1:

- Theme 3: Advancing Gender Equality in Hybrid: Recognition by female leaders of the impact the new flexible operating structure may have on gender equality in the workplace and the need for intentional strategies, programs, and initiatives for advancing gender equality in the workplace is a strategic imperative and requires intentional actions that align with the hybrid workplace model.

- Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid: The gender gap is widening post-COVID-19 in many industries, with female leaders making the difficult decision to resign from existing positions in search of roles that better align with their sense of purpose or desire for flexibility, deciding to remove themselves from promotional tracks, such as partnership ambitions or no longer pursuing senior leadership promotional opportunities, or deciding to leave the workforce entirely.
- Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid: Female leaders and aspiring leaders face obstacles they must navigate because of them taking on the lion’s share of childcare responsibilities and non-paid domestic duties, a barrier magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid: Female leaders in a hybrid workplace model face new barriers described in this study as the “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” dilemma, relating to a reduction in opportunities to participate in in-person networking opportunities for establishing and nurturing personal brand equity.
- Theme 7: Career Advancement Obstacles and Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Aspiring Female Leaders in Hybrid: Female leaders, particularly those in entry-level and mid-level positions, are experiencing obstacles to their career growth, given reduced serendipitous opportunities for networking, building connections, and gaining experiential knowledge

typically accomplished within in-person environments where synergies naturally occur, creating a hybrid workplace serendipity gap.

- Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid: When leading in a hybrid workplace model, female leaders face the risk of the formation of exclusive sub-cultures within teams, silos across departments, and team cohesion obstacles.
- Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid: The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a significant increase in mental health issues, such as increased levels of stress, anxiety, burnout, and feelings of disconnection, isolation, loneliness, and social phobia. Female leaders face mental health and well-being struggles themselves while also being required to support hybrid knowledge workers who may also be facing mental health struggles.
- Theme 10: Need for Female Leaders to Modify Their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid: Working with distributed teams in a hybrid workplace model requires female leaders to foster contextual understanding, creating an environment that supports collaboration and engagement in-person and remotely, and a performance and productivity measurement approach that aligns with the hybrid workplace model and builds trust.
- Theme 11: Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work–Life Balance in Hybrid: Female leaders have benefitted from the adoption of flexible operating structures, making it possible to re-think where,

when, and how work is performed while also normalizing and making space for female leaders to design the workplace model that best supports the needs of them as individuals and their teams, normalizing the prioritization of well-being.

- Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid: During the paradigm shift toward a hybrid workplace model, female leaders have the opportunity to self-reflect on their sense of purpose, reconfirm or set new career goals, and create a career road map to help them navigate potentially new barriers or opportunities found in a hybrid workplace model, while also embracing self-efficacy by intentionally creating serendipitous opportunities for growth and advancement. Overcoming the hybrid workplace serendipity gap.
- Theme 13: Technology Empowerment in Hybrid: Technological advances have made the hybrid workplace model possible. Technology allows female leaders to work from anywhere to lead distributed teams while maintaining optimal engagement, collaboration, performance, and productivity levels.
- Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid: During the transition and evolution of creating the optimal flexible operating structure, female leaders have an opportunity to intentionally and purposefully re-thinking and re-design the workplace operating structure to create a culture of belonging, inclusivity, cohesion, shared understanding, and sense of

community creating a unified hybrid workplace where all employees can thrive.

- Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid: Given the growing importance of being an authentic leader during times of change and uncertainty, such as the pandemic and transition to a flexible operating model, female leaders have the opportunity to leverage leaders skills such as empathy, resilience, adaptability, intuition, emotional intelligence, caring, encouragement, and inspiration while leading in a hybrid workplace model. Committing to embracing self-awareness and personal growth.
- Theme 16: Increased Access to Mentors and Support Networks in Hybrid: Given the normalization of connecting and collaborating remotely, the hybrid workplace model has unlocked opportunities for female leaders to establish new mentorship and support network connections without the restriction of significant time commitments or geographic barriers.

**Figure 8**

*Thematic Map for Research Question 1*



Data that emerged through a thematic analysis in response to RQ2 included a total of nine themes, with two themes related to the hybrid workplace model and seven themes related to the benefits of the Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model (as shown in Figure 9). The following provides a high-level description of the nine themes associated with RQ2:

- Theme 1: The Future of Work is Hybrid for Many Knowledge Workers: A paradigm shift is taking place that is revolutionizing the future of work, with female leaders having to navigate leading during the transition to a new normal, the permanent adoption of the Hybrid Workplace Model, a flexible operating structure.
- Theme 2: Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model: Female leaders are faced with the reality that leading the transition to a hybrid workplace model is a journey they must navigate, given that this new flexible operating structure is unique to each organization, department, and individual teams creating an environment that requires female leaders to be catalysts for change and innovation.
- Theme 17: The Benefits of Taking an Individualized Leadership Approach Compatible with the Complex and Flexible Nature of the Hybrid Workplace Models: The Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders the benefit of intentionally tailoring their leadership approach to accommodate each employee's specific needs, including their skills, capabilities, experiences,

work environment, ideal communication style, personal circumstances, and professional aspirations.

- Theme 18: The Benefits of Being an Adaptable Leadership Approach During Times of Change and Uncertainty: The Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders with a leadership style that is highly adaptable and resilient to dynamic, evolving, and changing operating structures.
- Theme 19: The Benefits of Empowering Employees and Cultivating Trust in a Hybrid Workplace Model: The Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders with the benefit of being focused on supporting employees' success through empowerment and creating a culture of trust.
- Theme 20: The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model: The Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders with a focus on establishing regular two-way communication channels between individual employees and the entire distributed team, ensuring a high level of transparency and message clarity while always being accessible to support employees.
- Theme 21: The Benefits of Team Engagement and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace Model: The Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders the benefits of creating optimal conditions to nurture employee engagement and collaboration in person or by leveraging technology to collaborate remotely.

- Theme 22: The Benefits of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and Growth Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model: The Situational Leadership® style benefits female leaders by embracing continuous growth and skills improvement for themselves and their followers. It includes developing the soft and technical skills necessary to succeed in an evolving hybrid workplace model, intentionally sharing knowledge, and nurturing a growth mindset.
- Theme 23: The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model: The Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders the benefit of leading authentically, trusting their intuition, allowing it to help inform decision-making and strategically intentional actions, and creating a safe environment where all employees can thrive in a culture of support, encouragement, and understanding.

**Figure 9**

*Thematic Map for Research Question 2*



Figure 10 illustrates the potential for the themes that emerged from under the category of opportunities in RQ1 and themes discovered in the category of benefits of Situational Leadership® style to help female leaders potentially navigate barriers discovered in RQ1. The following section identifies themes that emerged from the data associated with opportunities themes found in RQ1 and benefits of the Situational Leadership® style found in RQ2 that have the potential to help female leaders navigate the seven barriers identified in RQ1; barriers female leaders have experienced transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model including:

Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid (*Barrier*): Two themes that have the potential to help female leaders navigate the barrier associated with Theme 4 include, Theme 11: Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work–Life Balance in Hybrid and Theme 17: The Benefits of Taking an Individualized Leadership Approach Compatible with the Complex and Flexible Nature of the Hybrid Workplace Models. For example, looking closer at the potential for Theme 11 to help female leaders better navigate Theme 4, one cause of the leak in the pipeline relates to mental health, and the increased prioritization of mental health has the potential to impact the pipeline positively. According to Participant 7, the hybrid workplace model has reduced some of the stress, allowing female leaders to have more time for self-care related to a significant reduction in commuting time, resulting in an “Opportunity for less stress, for better mental health and well-being physically, there are so many pluses with having remote hybrid workplaces.”

Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid’ (*Barrier*): Two themes that have the potential to help female leaders navigate the barrier associated with Theme 5 include, Theme 13: Technology Empowerment in Hybrid and Theme 18: The Benefits of Being an Adaptable Leadership Approach During Times of Change and Uncertainty.

For example, looking closer at the potential for Theme 13 to help female leaders better navigate Theme 5, technology has made it possible for the mass adoption of a hybrid workplace model that allows employees to effectively work remotely, allowing for collaboration and productivity, which in turn allows for greater levels of flexibility that benefit all employees, but particularly those struggling to balance work and life such as working mothers. Participant 1 spoke about the technology empowering her ability to work from home and achieve a better work and life balance, explaining how having the ability to work remotely “made it easier because in between meetings I could throw in a little laundry or I could throw on something for dinner or pull something out of the, like so parts of it, made easier.”

Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid (*Barrier*): Two themes that have the potential to help female leaders navigate the barrier associated with Theme 6 include, Theme 16: Increased Access to Mentors and Support Networks in Hybrid and Theme 22: The Benefits of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and Growth Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model. For example, looking closer at the potential for Theme 16 to help female leaders better navigate Theme 6, with the increased ability to access mentors experience by most study participants, this

opportunity, according to many participants, has also had a positive impact on female leaders' ability to raise their personal brand. Participant 16 shared an example of a time when she encouraged an aspiring female leader to get involved in a mentorship-related initiative associated with a new employee resource group that was launched, resulting in this aspiring female increasing her personal brand awareness as Participant 16 received feedback from a member of this group that the aspiring female leader had done an excellent job saying "Wow, did she ever do a great job" Participant 16.

#### Theme 7: Career Advancement Obstacles and Decreased Serendipitous

Opportunities for Aspiring Female Leaders in Hybrid (*Barrier*): Two themes that have the potential to help female leaders navigate the barrier associated with Theme 7 include, Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid and Theme 21: The Benefits of Team Engagement and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace Model. For example, looking closer at the potential for Theme 21 to help female leaders better navigate Theme 7 with an overwhelming recognition by study participants that the hybrid workplace has reduced the number of serendipitous career growth opportunities for female leaders, Participant 17 shared an experience where her organization by leveraging the benefits associated with applying a Situational Leadership® style approach intentionally created opportunities for enhanced engagement and collaboration across teams that resulted in the creation of new serendipitous career growth opportunities. Participant 17's company took all possible steps to encourage in-person connection. She believes creating the right environment and culture to nurture career growth is essential, and Participant 17 shared

her belief that “culture walks the halls.” She explained, “We created opportunities for them to come in using driving and paying for their parking or paying for an Uber...we have a greater group now that has to work in the office” (Participant 17).

Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid (*Barrier*): Two themes that have the potential to help female leaders navigate the barrier associated with Theme 8 include, Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid and Theme 20: The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model. For example, looking closer at the potential for Theme 20 to help female leaders better navigate Theme 8, many study participants spoke of the creation of teams that are disunified in a hybrid workplace model in part due to poor communication and how having consistent and transparent communication can help to create more unified teams. According to Participant 12, the hybrid workplace model has normalized communicating more frequently through multiple communication channels, making it possible, in an example Participant 12 provided to make it comfortable to create more unified teams irrespective of which office they are in, which had previously been a concern associated with their expansion to new office locations, or if they choose to work from home certain days. The transition to communicating and collaborating in a hybrid workplace model was, from a positive perspective, according to Participant 12, a “huge unintended consequence,” making it possible for them to create team unity despite the team being more distributed.

Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid: Two themes that have the potential to help female leaders navigate the barrier

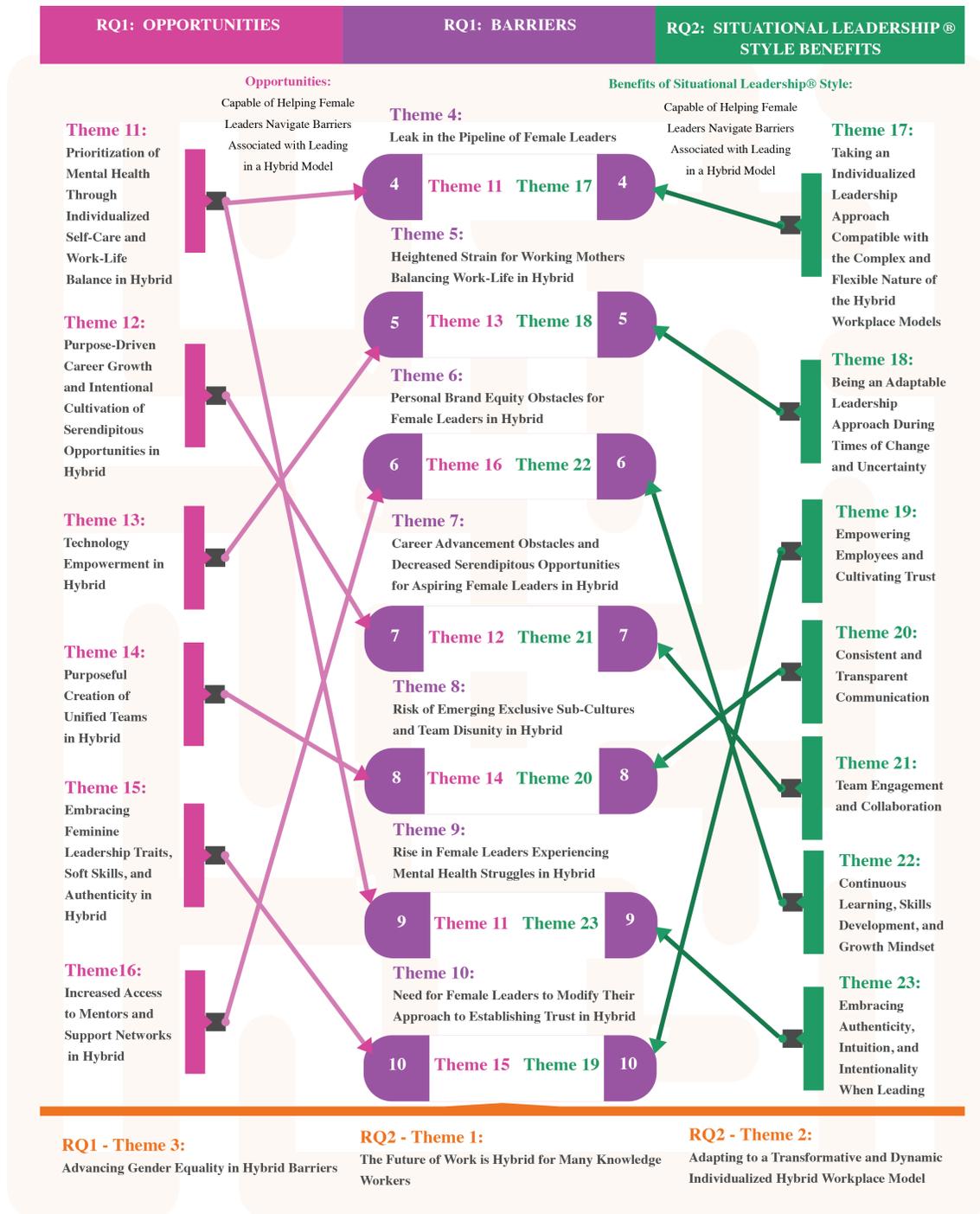
associated with Theme 9 include, Theme 11: Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work–Life Balance in Hybrid and Theme 23: The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model. For example, looking closer at the potential for Theme 23 to help female leaders better navigate Theme 9, all study participants spoke about the rise in mental health experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout this transition to a new normal when it comes to how companies will embrace the flexible hybrid workplace model. One of the benefits that have emerged from applying a Situational Leadership® style is the normalization and encouragement of embracing authenticity. Study participants spoke about the benefit of being your authentic selves having a positive impact on improving female leaders' mental health. Participant 15 spoke about the importance of being your authentic self, the benefit this has on mental health, and part of the authenticity relating to the ability to be seen as a human now that meetings are being conducted remotely, allowing people to see into one another's homes, "Hey, we're all human. We're all here. This is my home. That's your home. This is me as a person, as a human."

Theme 10: Need for Female Leaders to Modify Their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid (*Barrier*): Two themes that have the potential to help female leaders navigate the barrier associated with Theme 10 include, Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid and Theme 19: The Benefits of Empowering Employees and Cultivating Trust in a Hybrid Workplace Model. For example, looking closer at the potential for Theme 19 to help female leaders better

navigate Theme 10, one of the benefits of applying a Situational Leadership® style is the ability to adapt to the individuals' specific needs, experiences, and capabilities, creating the opportunity for building according to Participant 6 a stronger bond and level of trust. Participant 6 spoke about the importance of empowering employees and strengthening trust between the leader and the employee. Participant 6 recognizes that part of successfully empowering her team and building trust requests her to be consistent, saying, "I must stay consistent. Right? I must be the same person on Tuesday and Wednesday when I'm in the office as I am on Thursday when I'm virtual, and then how I communicate should be consistent. I have to be."

**Figure 10**

*Thematic Map Interconnections Between Research Questions 1 and 2*



***Step 6: Writing the Results and Responding to the Research Questions***

Upon completion of the creation, revision, and finalization of codes and themes, along with the development of the thematic maps, the data-finding results were then written in Microsoft Word to respond to the two RQs explored in this study along with presenting relevant participant quotations to add further clarity and depth of understanding. It is essential to acknowledge that throughout all six steps as a “reflective practitioner” (Iacono et al., 2009, p. 39), I documented the entire data analysis process and kept a researcher journal documenting, when necessary, my personal perspectives, assumptions, and potential biases. I also intentionally applied sensemaking during data collection and analysis while understanding and interpreting the data and identifying patterns (Cassell et al., 2018). Efforts were also made during the data analysis to ensure the study achieved trustworthiness. The following section provides evidence of trustworthiness, including a discussion of how a high level of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability was achieved in this study.

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Intentional actions were taken while conducting this study to ensure high trustworthiness was achieved in the research study’s findings. To establish the trustworthiness of data findings, evidence of the reliability and rigor of the findings is confirmed by a series of actions performed in four focus areas, including activities that support data credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Actions taken to support the credibility of the data findings provide evidence that the data is accurate and achievable (Peoples, 2021). Data transferability establishes evidence that study

findings can be transferred to other study populations (Braun & Clarke, 2008a). Data dependability of data offers evidence that the study findings are consistent. Finally, the confirmability of data offers evidence that the study findings accurately reflect the study participants' lived experiences and are not biased by researchers' personal biases (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). This section provides insight into actions taken to ensure trustworthiness in this study.

### ***Credibility***

In this study, I established credibility, by demonstrating the authenticity and trustworthiness of the findings by implementing the following trustworthiness strategies: audit trail, reflexivity and bracketing, member checks, triangulation, peer reviews, and data saturation. The audit trail I maintained documents the entire research journey from data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Some tools used to capture data included audio recordings and transcripts, research study journal notes, interview notes, interview observational and audit notes, and research and analytic memos (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). Reflexivity and bracketing were used while conducting my study by taking the time before conducting interviews to document in a researcher journal that I maintained throughout the study any preconceptions or potential biases based on my personal experiences that could have a potential to interpret the data from a specific perspective. I also only conducted one interview a day to ensure I had adequate time following the interview to reflect on the data captured, documenting insights provided by the study participants and my perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. Member checking was implemented in this study by providing every study participant with their transcript via

email within 24 hours. of interviewing to demonstrate to participants that their time was valuable and respected and to ensure that the information was still fresh in participants' minds. Study participants had ample time to review the data for accuracy.

Data collected from conducting interviews was then triangulated against the literature review findings and observational notes that I took during the interviews, where participants showed vulnerable emotions when discussing some topics, providing further evidence of the authenticity of the findings. Following data triangulation (see Appendix I), I submitted my findings for peer review and feedback to two experts in the field who are both academics holding a doctorate and currently in practice; one of the reviewers is regularly published in academic journals and is a published book author an expert in the field of female leadership and gender equality in the workplace. Finally, careful attention was paid to ensure that the data captured reached a saturation point; in fact, I conducted three additional interviews following the point of data saturation to ensure the highest possible quality of data before beginning interviews; my predicted average number of participants was up to 15, whereas this study included 18 study participants.

Following a thematic analysis approach to data analysis, I measured data saturation based on the lack of new information emerging from interviews and the literature review, along with identifying saturation during the various stages of creating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and re-defining themes, and after many reiterations of the themes based on data analysis I created three thematic maps (as shown in Figures 8–10) and wrote a summary of findings which was as discussed previously provided to peers for review.

### ***Transferability***

Establishing transferability in this study involved the extent to which the data found in this study can be generalized or applied to different participant groups and the extent to which similar findings could be found in similar groups in different geographical locations (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). For example, achieving transferability involved applying the following trustworthiness strategies: transparent methodology, variation in participant selection, thick descriptions, comparative analysis, and negative case analysis. Clearly defined and transparent methodology describing the steps taken to conduct this study outlined in Chapter 3, included the steps for data collection, thematic analysis, and writing of final study results, making it possible for future research to replicate this study with different study participants with similar or different demographic profiles and geographical locations. The sample variation in participant selection criteria is clearly defined in Chapter 3, providing future researchers with the transparency necessary to interpret and evaluate the study findings effectively by understanding the perspectives relative to the study population (Braun & Clarke, 2022b).

In this study, I also provided the rationale for selecting this specific study population, which involved female leaders who lead knowledge workers within a hybrid workplace model, given the importance of this flexible operating structure to this study. Thick descriptions were used together with thematic maps to make it easier for readers to understand and visualize the study findings, along with the data findings connection to the two RQs and the interconnections among the data findings. One example of the use of thick descriptions in this study, where I followed a thematic analysis approach, involved

the continuous and well-documented discovery of the emergence of initial codes, the establishment of a code framework, and the creation of initial themes development with thick descriptions. Each theme that emerged from the study data has an associated title sentence accompanied by a comprehensive description. Conducting a comparative and negative case analysis involved comparing the data findings against the literature review, identifying any potential data outliers, differences, or similarities in data, and identifying where knowledge was extended, or new knowledge emerged that was not found in the literature review in Chapter 2.

### ***Dependability***

Achieving study dependability relates to the study's ability to generate findings that are reliable and consistent having emerged from a study follows a clearly defined and rigorous research process focused on the achievement of study findings that are interpreted by the research in a trustworthy manner (Braun & Clarke, 2022b), achieving dependability involved the following trustworthiness strategies: researcher reflexivity, audit trail, methodological, consistency, consistent data collection, triangulation, and data saturation. At the beginning of this study, researcher reflexivity was achieved throughout the entire study by being self-aware and documenting any preconceptions, potential personal biases, and assumptions of the findings before conducting the research, during the data collection stage, and post-data collection during the analysis stage. An audit trail was maintained throughout the study by documenting every step of this study in a research journal, which included taking note of decisions and the purpose behind theme revisions, among many other important decisions that were made during this study.

A consistent methodology was followed throughout the study, and no adjustments or variations were required. Data were consistently collected in a formally structured and well-documented system with procedures that were replicated while acquiring data from each participant to ensure the dependability of the data collected. For example, following each interview, I would immediately take the time necessary to document in Microsoft OneNote any thoughts, insights, reflections, assumptions, and observations I discovered during the interview, followed by immediately having the audio recording transcribed initially by Scribe.com and upon receipt of the verbatim transcript I verified the transcript accuracy. Within 24 hours, I gave each participant their verbatim transcript for review. Triangulation and data saturation, as discussed previously, were achieved, and positively contributed towards achieving a high level of study dependability.

### ***Confirmability***

Efforts were made to achieve confirmability by comparing the study findings against other data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2022b); achieving confirmability involved the following trustworthiness strategies: reflexivity, thick descriptions, negative case analysis, and triangulation. As discussed earlier in this section, reflexivity was also used to achieve confirmability, lowering the potential for researcher bias by regularly documenting existing and changing researcher assumptions, biases, and preconceived preconceptions that could potentially influence study findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). As explained previously in this section, the use of thick descriptions also increases the study's ability to be confirmable by providing clarity to the reader of the study and a greater depth of articulation of findings, making it easier for them to cross-reference

findings with other data sources. Confirmability was also achieved similarly to other strategies for achieving a high level of trustworthiness through negative case analysis and triangulation.

### **Study Results**

I sought to answer the following two RQs:

RQ1: What are female leaders' lived experiences with identifying new barriers and opportunities they must navigate when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada, to adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

RQ2: What are the benefits of female leaders adopting a Situational Leadership® style when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada while adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

Upon completion of the data collection and thematic analysis, study findings were further confirmed through data triangulation, triangulating each of the 23 themes discovered in this study (see Appendix I), beginning with comparing study findings against the literature review conducted in Chapter 2 to ensure the credibility of data discoveries. The next step involved writing the study results and responding to the two RQs, which is presented in this section of Chapter 4. A total of 23 themes emerged from the data that answered the two RQs. A total of 14 themes emerged from the data related to answering RQ1, and a total of nine themes emerged from the data related to answering RQ2.

Looking at RQ1, one theme emerged explicitly related to the hybrid workplace and gender equality, offering context for the other themes that emerged related to barriers and opportunities, which included Theme 3: Advancing Gender Equality in Hybrid. The seven themes for RQ1 identify barriers that many female leaders face when leading in a hybrid workplace model include: Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid; Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid; Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid; Theme 7: Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Career Growth for Female Leaders in Hybrid; Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Subcultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid; Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid; and Theme 10: Need for Female Leaders to Modify Their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid.

The preceding six focus on RQ1 with the identification of opportunities female leaders face when leading in a hybrid workplace model include Theme 11: Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work–Life Balance in Hybrid; Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid; Theme 13: Technology Empowerment in Hybrid; Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid; Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid; and Theme 16: Increased Access to Mentors and Support Networks in Hybrid.

The final nine themes related to RQ2 include two themes focused on the hybrid workplace model include Theme 1: The Future of Work is Hybrid for Many Knowledge

Workers and Theme 2: Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model. The final additional seven themes in RQ2 focus on identifying benefits associated with applying a Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model, include Theme 17: The Benefits of Taking an Individualized Leadership Approach Compatible with the Complex and Flexible Nature of the Hybrid Workplace Models; Theme 18: The Benefits of Being an Adaptable Leadership Approach During Times of Change and Uncertainty; Theme 19: The Benefits of Empowering Employees and Cultivating Trust in a Hybrid Workplace Model; Theme 20: The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model; Theme 21: The Benefits of Team Engagement and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace Model; Theme 22: The Benefits of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and Growth Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model; and Theme 23: The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model.

The following section provides further insight into the 23 themes that emerged from the study findings and answers the two RQs, including providing verbatim quotes from the 18 study participants to support the findings and provide a greater depth of understanding. Beginning with RQ1, involving the review of Themes 3–16, followed by exploring RQ2, involving the review of Themes 1–2, and Themes 17–23.

### **Research Question 1**

RQ1 was, What are female leaders' lived experiences with identifying new barriers and opportunities they must navigate, and what leadership skills do they require when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office

environment in North America to adapting to a new hybrid workplace model? The first eight of 14 themes that provide answers to RQ1 focus on the hybrid workplace model, offering more profound insights into the environment that is influencing the barriers and opportunities female leaders must navigate, along with the identification of seven new barriers female leaders transitioning to leading in knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model have experienced. Table 7 provides a summary of Themes 3–10, including providing a high-level summary of each theme, and identifies the number of study participants who spoke about the theme, provided insights into their lived experiences, or shared stories of others in their organization who experienced the related theme, and in some cases also provided specific examples, experiences, or advice related to the theme.

**Table 7***Themes Identified Related to Barriers Participants Experienced for Research Question 1*

Theme and description	No. of participants referencing the theme
Theme 3: Advancing Gender Equality in Hybrid: Recognition by female leaders of the impact the new flexible operating structure may have on gender equality in the workplace and the need for intentional strategies, programs, and initiatives for advancing gender equality in the workplace is a strategic imperative and requires intentional actions that align with the hybrid workplace model.	18
Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid: The gender gap is widening post-COVID-19 in many industries, with female leaders making the difficult decision to resign from existing positions in search of roles that better align with their sense of purpose or desire for flexibility, deciding to remove themselves from promotional tracks, such as partnership ambitions or no longer pursuing senior leadership promotional opportunities, or deciding to leave the workforce entirely.	17
Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid: Female leaders and aspiring leaders face obstacles they must navigate because they are taking on the lion’s share of childcare responsibilities and non-paid domestic duties, a barrier magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic.	18
Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid: Female leaders in a hybrid workplace model face new barriers described in this study as the “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” dilemma, relating to the reduction of in-person networking opportunities for establishing and nurturing personal brand equity.	16
Theme 7: Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Career Growth for Female Leaders in Hybrid: Female leaders, particularly those in entry-level and mid-level positions, are experiencing obstacles to their career growth, given reduced serendipitous opportunities for networking, building connections, and gaining experiential knowledge typically accomplished within in-person environments where synergies naturally occur.	16
Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid: When leading in a hybrid workplace model, female leaders face the risk of the formation of exclusive sub-cultures within teams, silos across departments, and team cohesion obstacles.	15
Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid: The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a significant increase in mental health issues, such as increased levels of stress, anxiety, burnout, and feelings of disconnection, isolation, loneliness, and social phobia. Female leaders face mental health and well-being struggles themselves while also being required to support hybrid knowledge workers who may also be facing mental health struggles.	18
Theme 10: Need for Female Leaders to Modify their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid: Working with distributed teams in a hybrid workplace model requires female leaders to foster contextual understanding, creating an environment that supports collaboration and engagement in-person and remotely, and a performance and productivity measurement approach that aligns with the hybrid workplace model and builds trust.	15

### ***Exploration of Barriers Through the Lens of Female Leaders' Career Journey***

Study participants shared firsthand lived experiences and second-hand recounted experiences and observations of six commonly experienced barriers (Themes 3–10) that many female leaders must navigate while leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model.

**Theme 3: Advancement of Gender Equality in Hybrids.** The third final foundational theme provides insight that spans the entire study, addressing RQ1 and explores the recognition by female leaders of the impact the new flexible operating structure may have on gender equality in the workplace, therefore, the importance of continuing to support gender equality in the workplace today and in the future.

***Gender Inequality in the Workplace.*** Although most participants shared the belief that progress has been made toward achieving gender equality in the workplace, they also acknowledged the negative effect COVID-19 has had on achieving gender parity in senior leadership positions, confirming that the gender gap still exists, with some industries struggling with gender equality more than others. Participant 1 explained how progress had been made, yet still more progress is required by explaining how gender equality has “come a long way...several years back, our senior leaders made it very clear that our most senior levels were looking for achieving gender parity. And I think we have made inroads, but we still have some challenges when looking at senior leadership type roles, as we have fewer and fewer women.” Participant 4 expressed the lack of progress in closing the gender gap concerning female leaders hoping for senior leadership positions within the architectural industry by explaining, “I think the glass

ceiling very much still exists. And just the statement itself, I'm at 18% of female representation in my organization, let alone others in similar industries. I don't think we're there, obviously." Participant 16 also acknowledged the continued existence of the glass ceiling metaphor by saying, "The glass ceiling is not completely gone."

Although most participants spoke of the existing gender gap about female leaders holding senior leadership positions, a few participants shared a different opinion. Participant 7 explained, "I haven't noticed a huge difference in terms of how it relates to women versus men being promotion-ready," and Participant 4 shared a similar belief by explaining, "I don't think hybrid work has affected the point of view of female candidates or individuals that we're putting forward for partnerships." All participants acknowledged that the remote workplace environment was a very different experience during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown compared to today's. According to Participant 10, "This working from home experience is not the normal working from home experience. When I worked from home all those years ago, my kids were at daycare or school. I could work while I was at home. Nobody asked for help with their homework; I was effectively at an office," while working from home.

***Prioritization of Gender Equality.*** When it came to understanding if participants' companies were committed to prioritizing the achievement of gender equality in the workplace when transitioning to a hybrid workplace model, a new normal in embracing a flexible operating structure, all employees believed their organization had identified advancing gender equality as an important strategic initiative. Participant 1 described the commitment to supporting female leaders as a commitment to "making a conscious effort

to improve it,” recognizing that gender equality will not happen naturally. Participant 5 raises the importance of not simply achieving gender equality from a number’s perspective and shares, “I think for me the goal, I think the minimum standard we should aim for is that people feel welcome at work. If you’re just diverse, you’ve just checked a box for inclusion; it means you invited someone to a party, but it doesn’t mean that when they showed up and feel welcome there. The minimum standard is welcome.”

*Intentional Gender Equality Strategies, Programs, and Initiatives.* Most participants share insights into some of their gender equality strategies, programs, and initiatives currently underway to ensure that intentional action is taken to close the gender gap and align with corporate-level goals. Participant 4 shares how achieving gender equality is important within her organization. A strategic framework was established along with a specific mandate associated with closing the gender gap in senior leadership positions; furthermore, Participant 4 explained how “We do have a roadmap. We are aware of the imbalance and are actively working towards equality.” Sharing a similar perspective as Participant 4, Participant 7 explained the importance of leveraging employee resources groups and training programs focused on supporting female leaders, recognizing the importance of going “beyond like International Women’s Day,” acknowledging the fact that gender equality requires regular, intentional, and consistent actions for progress to be made toward achieving gender equality. Participant 14, who is in the accounting industry, referred to the labyrinth of leadership metaphor by explaining how there are “a lot of barriers in this industry for women trying to move through,” acknowledging the importance of understanding the barriers to ensure the right support

and initiatives are in place to help women succeed in the workplace and navigate career growth. According to Participant 14, “It is very important for the firm that achieving gender equality continues to be like top of mind, and we’re always looking at the best and brightest and whether they’re women or men, but we definitely want to promote women, ensure that we have that equity and equality.”

In another example, Participant 6 shares an example involving the creation of a “women’s network team, where it’s part of a corporate effort to make sure that we are supporting all the women at our organization to live, learn, and lead to their full potential, so because they might work on other teams and in other areas, just to make sure that we as a whole achieve our goals.” Finally, Participant 9 discussed having a “huge diversity, equity, and inclusion mandate in our practice.” Providing an interesting perspective, Participant 1 shared a belief that “Women in the workplace, and especially moms in the workplace, can really come out of this transition post-COVID in a better place,” which speaks to the importance of understanding any potential impact the transition to a flexible hybrid workplace model could have on gender equality in the workplace.

**Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid.** When presenting the barriers and opportunities findings during the data analysis, it became clear that a common concept that connects the barriers and opportunities is the finding discovered in this study, which was recognized as Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders, which was previously explained in detail in Chapter 2, the leak in the pipeline is a metaphor used to describe the (Moak et al., 2020) of the continued existence of the gender gap, particularly about female leaders advancing their careers to senior leadership

positions, recognizing that female representation is required at all stages of the career pipeline.

The commonly held belief among study participants is that the leak in the pipeline of female leaders worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to be negatively affected to this day, as confirmed by Participant 2, who stated, “I’ve seen a huge change in the pipeline of female leaders, especially working moms after the pandemic.” Participant 1 acknowledged the importance of addressing the leak in the pipeline and shared how “they do have programs in place to improve pipeline,” recognizing the importance of addressing this issue. Many study participants recognized that a substantial population of female leaders must be able to make it to senior management or partnership level positions to be positioned for the opportunity to be promoted to executive levels of leadership; when leaks in the pipeline happen, this reduces the organization’s ability to achieve gender equality. Participant 14, when asked about the importance of a robust pipeline, stated, “I would say it’s very important. Many women have entered the profession, but it is not at the senior leadership levels or partnership roles.”

Three industries emerged from the findings as having expressed the most concern for the peak in the pipeline of female leaders, all of which share the highest level of career growth and achievement involving becoming a partner or managing partner within their respective professional practice. The three industries include the architectural, accounting, and legal professions. Looking at the architectural industry, according to Participant 4, barriers still exist when it comes to female leaders advancing to partner

level that is still not clearly understood as Participant 4 explains, “We have good representation from the leadership at an associate level, which means we're able to recognize and advance women in that way. But what barriers exist when it comes to the partnership level? And so clearly to me, they're still major unknown hurdles.” Also, from the architectural industry, Participant 5 openly shared a deeply personal life experience explaining how she is personally a firsthand example of a leak in the pipeline as she made the difficult decision for her own mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic to take a leave of absence but has since returned to work, providing an example of how Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid related to the rise of mental health can have an impact on the leak in the pipeline.

Participant 5 explained her situation by saying, “I personally took a leave of absence during the COVID-19 pandemic. I was gone for 5 months, and I think part of the strategy for me was recognizing that I needed a break, and that was very difficult to admit because that felt like a failure that felt like, again, you're supposed to suck it up and carry on. You can't let them see you break, and you can't let them see all of this and realize I wasn't leading by example if I did that.” Participant 5 provided an example of how she courageously prioritized her mental health and opened the doors for other employees in the company to speak openly about and prioritize mental health.

In another example, Participants 9, 14, and 17, representing the accounting industry, all acknowledged the leak in the pipeline of female leaders achieving partnership level, not from a lack of opportunity or willingness of the respective accounting firm's desire to promote and support female leaders as there is a commitment

along with support programs according to all three participants. All three participants provided insight into second-hand observations of female leaders who were approved to progress to the partnership level before the COVID-19 pandemic and who, during the past 3 years, made the decision to remove themselves from the partnership track.

Participant 17 said, “We had one woman who was up for a partner that year and asked to remove herself from the partnership,” continuing to explain one of the deciding factors.

Participant 17 explained the fact that “she has four children, they were all very young and with the pandemic, and then going through this process of even preparing for the interviews, she was not willing to do it, so she actually went down to 4 days and asked to defer for a year. The next year, I think she realized that she liked her new pace, and she did not want to go back into that route; she’s taken a different route and still has a very high role, but she does not want to move up anymore, she said maybe after the kids are older.”

This finding in the leak in the pipeline also supports and demonstrates an interconnection with the finding in Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid related to female leaders who are working mothers being more affected when it comes to career growth. For example, Participant 17 continues to discuss her belief that “I think women have had to make decisions. We have not had any men come in with the same example; all of them went through, so I do think it’s an example of how women take that responsibility, maybe a little heavier.”

Participant 17 also provided an example of a leak in the pipeline resulting from female leaders making the decision to take early retirement, explaining how “one of our

senior managers in a very big role in the organization, always talked about wanting to be a partner, who actually during the pandemic announced her retirement, and she's not very old at all...she completely re-evaluated her life." This early departure of talent, an example of struggles with female talent retention, could potentially harm the pipeline beyond the individual retiring to future female leaders since this also represents a loss of knowledge in the form of mentorship opportunities. For example, Participant 2 from the banking industry explained how the leak in the pipeline of female leaders has resulted in "many people retiring early. I've seen many individuals previously considering management positions no longer doing so, a lot less sponsorship and mentorship, just because executives are tired." Participant 2 continues by explaining how "There are not as many female leaders I can have them pair with. I know I've had, for example, this past week alone, ten requests for mentorships, and I can't accommodate it because there aren't very many female leaders in my company to meet the demand for mentorship support."

Also, in the field of accounting, Participant 14 shares an experience of a female leader making the decision to leave the workplace altogether, explaining how there are still barriers that exist that they have yet to address, which is resulting in top female talent leaving the workplace before reaching partnerships levels. For example, Participant 14 explains how "There is a barrier to what works for them. I don't think we've solved that yet. We have a lot of those challenges. The employee I spoke about left the company because, after a period, we offered flexibility and other ways that she could maybe have a reduced schedule. Still, she didn't want reduced pay and everything that comes with sacrificing or making those hard decisions. She found another fully remote role, she can

work from home now, and it works for her. Unfortunately, we get to a point where that's the choice that employees have to make because we just aren't, we're not there yet in terms of making it work for people."

Participant 14 shared a second example of a leak in the pipeline, explaining, "We have another employee who is a senior manager going to make an offer of partnership very soon and in a similar situation, with young children at home. And I see her having to make that same kind of really challenging decisions, and I think it'll be interesting to see how it plays out because, to this point, the people that have made it to the level that I've made it to a partnership level, through pure sacrifice." Recognizing that a solution to encouraging females to reach partnership levels is not known, Participant 17 expressed a desire at a corporate level to understand better the barriers causing the leak in the pipeline by explaining how "We want to understand what our gaps are in our population and our leadership pipeline, and then build a plan for that."

Participant 12, representing the legal industry, shared the second-hand experience of a peer in her firm who made the decision not to pursue a partnership, explaining how becoming a partner requires a commitment to in addition to performing your job to a high standard, it also requires building a book of business, in other words creating a strong client base, which requires networking. As Participant 12 explains, "Being out in the world. We used to network by going to galas and lunches, and now we network in different ways... There's just not quite as many of those anymore. I think part of the unintended consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic is that we filled in all those hours with other things. Now there's no free time or extra time, no free time. Still, extra time

for those events, types of networking, or social events.” Participant 12 believes that “generally networking is still better in person,” often resulting in synergistically meeting with potential clients or other individuals who have the potential to become part of your network and connect you with knowledge and prospective clients. According to many study participants, this leak in the pipeline is interconnected with Theme 7: Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Career Growth for Female Leaders in Hybrid. Many participants mentioned during the interviews experiencing either firsthand or witnessing second-hand a barrier emerging during the pandemic and while operating in a hybrid workplace model regarding the decrease in in-person connections resulting in a decrease of potential connections that could help female leaders achieve career growth.

Other participants within other industries represented in this study also shared similar stories supporting the leak in the pipeline, including Participant 7, who shared how during the COVID-19 pandemic, she “felt like that was like the biggest shift, were I saw and was dealing with an increase in leaves of absences. Then you’re dealing with all these outages on the team.” Participant 14 also shared an interesting realization that also has the potential to negatively affect the pipeline of female leaders achieving senior leadership positions, which relates to the next generation placing a high level of importance on work–life balance, which interconnects with opportunity discovered in Theme 11: Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work–Life Balance in Hybrid. Participant 14 explained how, based on her experience advancing to a partnership level in her generation, “We haven’t advanced to partnership levels with the benefits of flexibility, but the next generation is saying no to the traditional

demanding partnership track expectations and pressures. The next generation wants flexibility and other ways of working, and many choose not to pursue partnership career aspirations. So, it'll be interesting to see how we manage through that as a firm because it has been an interesting challenge," an issue that several study participants expressed.

**Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid.** Most participants mentioned during their interview that many female leaders at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period in March 2020 (Kaushik, 2020) required companies, schools, and daycares to transition with little to no notice to a purely remote working structure, placing added pressure on parents, particularly on working mothers, who find themselves struggling to balance working from home with the significant increase in childcare and non-paid domestic household responsibilities (Carli, 2020). The transition to remote work took place during a time when there was also increased change and uncertainty in adapting to a new operating model at work (Participant 1). Some participants also acknowledged the wider parenthood penalty concept; for example, Participant 6 shared a perspective that was only mentioned by a few other study participants, explaining how "I have not seen it impact women more than men; it has brought parents to the forefront; I've seen parents impacted by it for sure." The more widely held and discussed experience was similar to one expressed by Participant 1, who spoke to the existence of traditional gender roles still being in place to explain why female leaders were impacted more during the pandemic and still operating in a hybrid workplace model. Participant 1 said, "So as a female leader, I am independent, and I have a very wonderful husband, and he is an understanding guy, but

despite who is the primary earner, we still do have somewhat traditional roles, where I do the majority of the cooking, the cleaning, the laundry, the organization of children and everything else,” associated with traditional gender roles in the home.

Theme 5, related to the heightened strain on working mothers, also interconnects with Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid based on many examples where the stress created by working from home while balancing family responsibilities hurt female leaders’ mental health, which also has the potential to affect the pipeline negatively Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid with female leaders struggling with mental health issues preventing them from advancing their careers or even retaining current positions in the workplace in some cases. For example, Participant 1 shared how working mothers who were balancing work and children at the peak of the pandemic faced increased challenges as the pandemic “Made it more difficult it was like you never stopped working because the day just continued...sometimes as a working woman, especially those with children the workplace provided us with a break from the rest of the chaos of our personal lives...but during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no break from life, because of homeschooling,” due to the closure of schools and daycares during the pandemic lockdown, forcing many knowledge workers to adopt a remote workplace model. Participant 1 shared a personal story about hosting a meeting with 30 senior executives. During the meeting, her child interrupted her several times, saying, “Mom, I need help with this, mom, help, I need to switch between Google Meet, or Mom, I need help going

on this site...It was more challenging for us because of the multiple hats that we were wearing.”

A typical feeling shared among several study participants was clearly expressed by Participant 5, who said, “In one moment you could be a worker or employee, the next your mom and/or dad and homeschooling and/or taking care of a parent or worried about what's happening in the world. So, from there, it just shifted to that check-in. And again, you're on the screen 24/7. So, it's just exhausting.” Participant 5 provided further insight into the experience of female leaders transitioning to leading in a hybrid workplace model during a significant amount of change and uncertainty by explaining, “What's difficult is the volume; what's difficult is nothing changed for us, it just became more, it became different, it became non-stop, it became where every now and then, you could go behind stage and you could take a breath, now you're always on stage, everything is exposed, and that means your kids are running in or your dog is freaking out or whatever, and you're trying to hold it together, but nothing changes, so the workload as a mother has just quadrupled...It just increased exponentially.”

Participant 5 spoke to the importance of recognizing that although the schools are now open when female leaders are working remotely, even in a hybrid model, there are often periods when female leaders still must balance work and children at home, for example, the time before and after school where many children are home when female leaders are working (Participant 14). Participant 8 clearly captured the feeling expressed by many participants by saying, “The whole idea that women have it all, like the superwoman who can balance everything, that's not really fair at all.”

**Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid.**

A very interesting barrier that emerged from the study findings relates to the existence of a new phenomenon described in this study as an “out-of-sight, out-of-mind dilemma” (Participant 6) that relates to increased obstacles female leaders face in establishing strong personal brand awareness in a hybrid workplace model due to the significant reduction of opportunities to connect and the potential decreased visibility and exposure to decision-makers when working remotely. The hybrid workplace model is a flexible operating structure that includes a balance of working in-office and remotely, therefore reducing the opportunities for female leaders to build brand equity given the reduction of in-person networking opportunities and decrease in opportunities to interact with leaders and decision-makers in-person (Participant 12), sharing some common obstacles found in Theme 7: Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Career Growth for Female Leaders in Hybrid.

According to many participants, a decrease in personal brand equity can negatively affect female leaders’ ability to be recognized and selected for career growth opportunities such as participation in training programs, stretch assignments, or even promotional opportunities. Supporting this finding of the risk of reduced brand awareness when operating remotely, Participant 6 explained, “I think that's why we are back 2 days a week. While we can effectively work on a project, a paper, or whatever at home, being completely disconnected creates an out of sight, out of mind disadvantage.” Participant 6 provided further clarity into the importance of having a strong image and exposure when female leaders seek career growth by sharing an example of the framework her company

follows when deciding to promote, all the elements she had to demonstrate when achieving her promotion that she successfully achieved during the pandemic.

Participant 6 explained that to be promoted, female leaders must “One, get clear on what you want, get clear on who the stakeholders are who will get you there, and then two, get clear on your action plan. We use a framework called PIE, which stands for performance, image, and exposure,” with the image and exposure being both related to personal brand equity. Participant 6 explains, “Performance relates to the need to deliver on your performance to be considered to move up. What is your image? What is your brand equity? Are you a hard worker? Are you the brilliant strategist, creative, or the must-get in every case? What is your equity? What are you known for? And then exposure, are you exposed to the people who, at that moment, will be deciding about your future, and what is your action plan to get in front of them?”

Participant 4 also supports the common belief among participants, including that of Participant 6, when it comes to the importance of personal brand image and exposure, by saying, “There are partners and individuals that feel that having people able to recognize you is valuable because they’re then the top of your mind” (Participant 4) for career growth opportunities and promotions. A few study participants also acknowledged the potential benefits associated with the hybrid workplace model for raising personal brand awareness; for example, Participant 4 also said, “I think we were doing it even more now, and that’s a by-product of really recognizing that we don’t have to really live in the same cities and be in the same office to collaborate. And so, what that’s allowed is

exposure to more individuals, which allows more women to get exposed to different opportunities with partners and projects. I think that's of great benefit.”

**Theme 7: Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Career Growth for Female Leaders in Hybrid.** Perhaps arguably one of the most thought-provoking findings from this study relates to identifying barriers female leaders have experienced when leading in a hybrid workplace model related to Theme 7, which relates to the decrease in serendipitous opportunities typically found during unplanned or unexpected encounters. For example, meeting a senior leader in the lunchroom and having an unexpected opportunity to have lunch together could potentially result in new knowledge or insights, having an unexpected conversation with a peer in another department that could lead to awareness of a new promotional opportunity, or serendipitously meeting industry experts at a conference or event that could result in unexpected opportunities such as finding a new mentor or introduction to a new prospective client (Participant 14). Although study participants acknowledged that serendipitous opportunities always exist, most participants acknowledged that the hybrid workplace has reduced the number of serendipitous meetings, given the reduction of in-person meetings, conferences, and socialization in the workplace.

When discussing the potential for female leaders to miss out on serendipitous career growth opportunities related to leading in a hybrid workplace model, Participant 6 said, “You will just naturally miss out from conversations, from discussions, it is so easy to be walking and stop to talk to the person you visually see versus to think, well I’m going to ping so and so, I don’t want to ping you, I might be distracting you, you might

be in a meeting, I'm just going to wait to tell you, and then I might remember to share the information with you. And so, there's a balance, and I think we're all going to find our way through it." According to Participant 3, "Running into people was a thing of the past hallway conversation, and it doesn't happen. So, I think it's happened twice in 2 years that I've bumped into someone important at work and had a nice five-minute chat about the weather...And there are also fewer opportunities with a hybrid; for example, why go to Israel for a symposium when you can attend cheaper online?"

This finding related to fewer networking sessions available in-person does provide one potential opportunity discussed in Theme 22: The Benefits of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and Growth Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model with online conferences now making learning more accessible with many educational events being accessible online resulting in more affordable access to education according to several participants. Participant 8 explained an interesting perspective on how Zoom is transactional versus relationship developing, implying that the ability to build a stronger connection or collaborate more effectively with others requires being in person. Participant 8 explained, "I just need to know who to talk to. And the issue with Zoom is that it's all transactional. Not the relationships but the meetings. This is compared to when you meet and have lunch together, where you talk about movies, and something valuable and unexpected comes up that could prove to be helpful professionally. You could potentially overhear an important conversation" that could be serendipitously important.

Participant 8 shares experiences that relate to experiencing a decrease in opportunities for serendipitous opportunities that emerge from in-person interactions largely found when in-office by explaining how in a traditional in-office operating model before adopting a hybrid workplace model, Participant 8 said, “I used to try to intentionally bump into the senior person that I wanted to notice me. If you’re in a hierarchical environment and need an excuse to talk to someone, you can watch your VP, your GM, or president and say, okay, well, do they have a certain habit of always eating lunch at noon in this cafeteria? You can circumvent a little bit of the politics and the hierarchy by just being in the same place as decision-makers,” an approach that is a little harder to do in a hybrid workplace model and requires more intentional actions, which is discussed more in Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid. Similarly, Participant 2 said, “I do find in a remote environment, it’s less natural because when you’re in the office, those coffee conversations or those people interactions occur naturally versus now you have to seek them out a lot more and it can sometimes feel like it’s more effort.”

**Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Subcultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid.** Many participants shared firsthand and second-hand experiences that spoke to the emergence of a different, more exclusive sub-culture that was beginning to create some disunity among team members in the hybrid workplace model, which female leaders must be aware of so that they can lead their teams effectively. More specifically, study participants found a difference in the culture between those hired before the COVID-19 pandemic when operating in a traditional in-office environment and those

hired after the pandemic in a flexible operating structure. Employees hired before the pandemic had time to form bonds in person and shared experiences that they can reflect on and bond over, compared to those hired at the beginning or during the pandemic who have had limited opportunities to connect in person.

Participant 2 compared this phenomenon of disunity among teams described as sub-groups typically found in high school; Participant 2 said, “I call it high school. So, there are some cliques. From people who were just comfortable always doing the same thing, I would categorize them mostly as employees who are not good with change. The ones who had been with the company for a long time didn’t like change or whatnot; they stuck together. Then, there are the newer employees who are open to and run with all sorts of change.” Another term used to describe the exclusive sub-cultures by participants was “employee clicks” (Participant 1). Specific actions have had to be taken to support the new hires better in adapting to the culture and expectations of a hybrid workplace model. According to Participant 1, “We are also very clear now with all new hires. It’s been much easier for anyone new to the organization; here is the structure, here are your expectations.”

Participant 4 shared an experience by explaining, “The team pursues projects; they win work, and the team executes it for the most part. I would argue that that hasn’t changed in COVID or through hybrid working. I think there’s a greater disconnect with staff just because you don’t have that exposure to that particular partner in that way or you’re not as physically present around them,” pointing to the importance of ensuring that senior leaders are also being intentional about ensuring they are accessible and not falling

into the trap of working from home and not being accessible even in the hybrid workplace model. Participant 8 provided a firsthand perspective as a new employee joining the organization at the beginning of the pandemic. Participant 8 said, “As a new employee, I find it’s just harder to get to know people and develop relationships with them,” explaining how important it is to ensure new employees feel included and part of the culture.

Participant 6 made an excellent point about identifying the potential risk of creating team unity in a distributed team where some employees work in the office, and others work remotely. Participant 6 said, “If we are in a virtual world and we’re not having that meeting, that is something that could get lost with a ping that says, go do A, B, and C, and the person could be missing the why we’re doing A, B, and C. And so, you have to change. You have to think about the important things in that world to translate into the virtual world and understand that ping cannot convey what a conversation can. So then it’s okay that, in context, it is just as an example of, ‘Hey, we’re going to have a meeting and talk about the next project.’ It’s very easy to ping; please go do A, B, and C.”

This finding also points to the importance of communication, which is discussed in Theme 20: The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model. Participant 6 shared another vital observation about team unity requiring high employee engagement by explaining, “I think sometimes it’s easier to get distracted in a hybrid workplace; it’s easy to be in a meeting and to be multi-tasking, and so you will show up differently than you would if you were multitasking and instead you

were sitting in front of somebody and you would therefore show up differently. That could affect men. That could affect women. I've heard people say things like, oh, I put that in the background, and I'm chopping vegetables. Again, you would never do that. Maybe it's the savings of time; maybe you're showing up as less engaged."

A few of the participants had a completely different perspective on the formation of exclusive subcultures and disunity in the team, as they have experienced something completely different and believe instead that the adoption of remote work and, more specifically, the hybrid workplace model has normalized working in teams that are geographically distributed, which is discussed in Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid. For example, Participant 1 said, "It was actually easier to communicate regularly," as meeting in person was challenging given the size of her team and the fact that they are all geographically distributed across large geographic locations.

**Theme 9 – Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid.** Findings from this study support the recognition that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a significant rise in female leaders experiencing mental health struggles that continue to affect female leaders today as they lead in stressful environments and evolving operating structures, creating an atmosphere of change and uncertainty that requires leaders to be resilient and adaptable. All study participants acknowledged struggles with mental health, with the following mental health issues discussed most consistently among participants: increased levels of stress, anxiety, burnout, feelings of disconnection, isolation, loneliness, and social phobia, findings that are consistent with the literature review in Chapter 2. Participant 8 shared results from an internal survey

conducted during the pandemic, saying, “We received feedback through engagement and other surveys that people felt like they constantly had to be on, and their work–life balance went completely out of whack. And we realized that because they were home and we were always meeting, we were always talking to people that they wouldn’t stop working,” this constant work has, according to many participants, resulted in burnout for many female leaders.

Many participants believed that the pandemic and adoption of a hybrid workplace model have brought to the forefront the importance of re-thinking work concerning someone’s sense of purpose and personal life priorities. According to Participant 1, “I think we focused a lot more on the craft of what we do, but what we lost candidly speaking, during that period of time, we lost a bit of the why we do what we do.” Participant 4 also speaks to this notion of a new normal regarding how organizations and female leaders think about work–life. Participant 4 explained how she “generally thinks the notion of balance of home responsibilities, personal responsibilities, and work responsibilities needs to be able to be more balanced, in terms of having some time to work from home, in person, and where I think the differences that are very specific to gender and this is known database, and I’m sure you know this is that women take on greater roles of family responsibilities or even with elderly parents not just children, but even elder or multi-generational responsibilities land typically on females within a heteronormative relationship. And so, the issue is, has it improved for those individuals?”

Many study participants shared personal experiences with feeling isolated as a leader, leading during times of uncertainty and constant and continuous change, and

feeling pressured to be the rock for their followers when they were unsure or confident. Participant 5 explained how being the rock for others during the pandemic and change involving the transition to a hybrid workplace model “was the real challenge. Then, when trying to manage from a leadership perspective, you’re trying to hold it together for so many people, and you can’t let them see you crack. And especially in HR, it’s like, ‘Where do I go? Who do I talk to?’ And so that from the leadership perspective was difficult, but I had a great support system, so I was luckier than most.” Participant 5 shared one of her profound personal self-discoveries, sharing how “The biggest thing that I have learned over all of this is that life is a paradox and that it is non-binary in every shape and form, there is no either-or, there is no on-off, in-out, up-down, very rarely. We can hold conflicting spaces, and I think that was my biggest lesson and mantra: if you’re sad right now, be sad. That’s okay because you can be sad and grateful, you can be scared and hopeful, you can be all at once, you can be petrified about what’s happening with your health and your children and their health, and yet grateful that they’re being homeschooled and safe at home.”

According to all participants, a normalization occurred when it came to prioritizing mental health and creating a “common language” (Participant 8) around openly speaking about mental health and wellness at work. Some participants took the mental health of their employees, particularly during the peak of the pandemic, so seriously that they strategically outlined “watch lists” (Participant 8), which identified employees most at risk from a mental health perspective, and leaders intentionally

reached out to those employees regularly, many included working mothers balancing work–life during the pandemic lockdown.

From another perspective, participants also shared stories of how the hybrid workplace model, with its flexibility, made it easier for female leaders in many cases to adapt their work around their life, resulting in improved mental health, as discussed in Theme 11: Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work–Life Balance in Hybrid. For example, Participant 4 said, “I would say probably that I have friends who have children; they’re able to pick up their kids at a certain time and be home for them.” She added, “Then they log in at different times to compensate, and they work around that, which I think has allowed that aspect of work–life balance to be successful.”

**Theme 10: Need for Female Leaders to Modify Their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid.** Establishing trust has become a top priority among many female leaders leading in a hybrid workplace model since these leaders are adapting to leading distributed teams that are spending a considerable amount of time working remotely, creating a potential transparency barrier when it comes to knowing what employees are working on, the progress they are making, and ensuring that leaders can identify promptly those employees who may be struggling but are not comfortable with asking for help, a concept that also presents an opportunity that is discussed in Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid. Most study participants acknowledged the need for female leaders to recognize potential barriers to contextual understanding among team members, the importance of creating an environment that supports

collaboration and engagement in-person and remotely, and the potential need to adapt the performance and productivity measurement matrix that aligns with the hybrid workplace model. Participant 13 explained, “It all goes back to lack of trust in a way and assumptions. And so, my lens is around women that have children or caregiving because I think that’s the perception that assumes working mothers, they’re just going to be at their home with their kids, or now they’re going to be taking the extra time to do all these things that have nothing to do with work. I think it also goes back a lot to those gender roles. I think those assumptions are what get in the way because she’s at home automatically, so she’s cooking, cleaning, and doing all these other things. When I think about it, it’s ridiculous to make these types of baseless assumptions.” Participant 1 said “My management style was still very base centered on personal relationships, knowing your team, trusting them, them trusting you by having open, transparent conversations,” recognizing the importance of establishing a foundation of trust among the team and leaders.

Participant 5 discussed the importance of building trust and having empathy and understanding for all team members, explaining that “It’s an issue of trust and knowing who your team is. Get to know them better and know them as human beings, and it’ll be much easier to understand what they’re going through. And then we don’t take it as personally. Because if I know that you are struggling with something that I might not have known before...I can realize this isn't them being lazy. I can stop and say, is everything okay? Ask if you need my support anywhere?” Participant 5 also shared valuable insight into trust and the connection between trust and empowerment by

explaining, “It’s all been an exercise in trust, so it allowed me to say even more strongly, through action, I trust you. If you’re telling me that this is what you mean, I believe you. Okay, if we have issues or concerns, I’m going to have enough respect for you to have that conversation as well. And that’s what we’ll do. I think it empowered my team because it was really through action and affirmation that I believe in you and that I trust you. They’ll tell me what they need now, and I’ll be like, be there for them.”

The remaining six of the 14 themes that provide answers to RQ1 focus on six new barriers experienced by female leaders transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model. Table 8 provides a summary of Themes 11–16, including providing a high-level summary of each theme, and identifies the number of study participants who spoke about the theme, provided insights into their lived experiences, or shared stories of others in their organization who experienced the related theme, and in some cases also provided specific examples, experiences, or advice related to the theme.

**Table 8***Themes Related to Opportunities Participants Experienced for Research Question 1*

Theme and description	No. of participants referencing the theme
Theme 11: Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work–Life Balance in Hybrid: Female leaders have benefitted from the adoption of flexible operating structures, making it possible to re-think where, when, and how work is performed while also normalizing and making space for female leaders to design the ideal hybrid workplace model that best supports the needs of them as individuals and their teams, normalizing the prioritization of well-being.	18
Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid: During the paradigm shift toward a hybrid workplace model, female leaders have the opportunity to self-reflect on their sense of purpose, reconfirm or set new career goals, and create a career road map to help them navigate potentially new barriers or opportunities found in a hybrid workplace model, while also embracing self-efficacy by intentionally creating serendipitous opportunities for growth and advancement. Overcoming the hybrid workplace serendipity gap.	17
Theme 13: Technology Empowerment in Hybrid: Technological advances have made the hybrid workplace model possible. Technology allows female leaders to work from anywhere and to lead distributed teams while maintaining optimal engagement, collaboration, performance, and productivity levels.	18
Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid: During the transition and evolution of creating the optimal flexible operating structure, female leaders have an opportunity to intentionally and purposefully re-thinking and re-design the workplace operating structure to create a culture of belonging, inclusivity, cohesion, shared understanding, and sense of community creating a unified hybrid workplace where all employees can thrive.	17
Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid: Given the growing importance of being an authentic leader during times of change and uncertainty, such as the pandemic and transition to a flexible operating model, female leaders have the opportunity to leverage leaders skills such as empathy, resilience, adaptability, intuition, emotional intelligence, caring, encouragement, and inspiration while leading in a hybrid workplace model.	18
Theme 16: Increased Access to Mentors and Support Networks in Hybrid: Given the normalization of connecting and collaborating remotely, the hybrid workplace model has unlocked opportunities for female leaders to establish new mentorship and support network connections without the restriction of significant time commitments or geographic barriers.	16

### *Opportunities Female Leaders Navigate in a Hybrid Workplace Model*

Study participants shared firsthand accounts and second-hand recounted experiences and observations of six commonly experienced opportunities (Themes 11–12) that many female leaders must navigate while leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model. The opportunities discovered in this study and presented in this section are largely focused on the perspective of the participants who are mid-level to senior leaders and executives or partners with a minimum of five direct reports.

**Theme 11: Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work–Life Balance in Hybrid.** Despite there being several barriers female leaders often must navigate, as discussed earlier in the barriers section, many obstacles, such as the ones found in Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid and Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid. The hybrid workplace model has also created opportunities that have allowed female leaders to benefit from the flexible operating structure, such as prioritizing mental health, self-care, and work–life balance. All study participants agreed and shared examples of how the hybrid workplace model allows female leaders to have greater levels of control in deciding where, when, and even how work is performed; participants also all acknowledged the increasing normalization of prioritizing mental health and well-being. According to most participants, the pandemic resulted in many female and male leaders reflecting on their careers, purpose, and lives to ensure they follow their purpose and “choose to make a difference” (Participant 17) in both their personal and professional lives.

Many participants believed this increase in self-reflection resulting from the flexible operating structure (Participant 14) could have a positive mental health impact as it shifts the mindset to empowerment and opportunity. According to study participants, a new normal has emerged when it comes to a strong desire by female leaders to have increased levels of empowerment and control over where, when, and how work is performed. Participant 17 shared a personal belief based on firsthand experiences, explaining, “I think we’re seeing people deliver more and work harder but also take time off. Now, it doesn’t always work. I’d love to say my work–life balance is perfect, and I always manage everything. Some days I’m working, super long days, and other weeks, I can find a better balance,” a finding that is also valuable to better understanding Theme 10: Need for Female Leaders to Modify Their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid.

The normalization of prioritizing mental health is a common perspective shared by all study participants, including the recognition that boundaries between work and life are essential, particularly in a hybrid workplace model where leaders and followers are both spending a significant amount of time working from home, making it challenging to establish barriers that prevent becoming a workaholic (Participant 8). Participant 2 spoke about the importance of boundaries, explaining, “So I think there’s a renewed sense of setting boundaries. When we were in the traditional office model, it was easier to turn it off, if you will, because you can leave the work at the office and then come home. I think during COVID, some of those lines got blurred, and some individuals took advantage,” and normalizing working consistently beyond the traditional or required work hours, since the work is now performed in your home.

One policy Participant 2 shared that helps to create boundaries is the agreement among the team not to hold any Zoom meetings “between 12 and one unless it is urgent and no-meetings on Friday afternoons policy” (Participant 2). In June 2021, the Canadian Federal Government approved “Bill 27, Working for Workers Act, 2021” (*Working for Workers Act, 2021*, 2021, para. 1), which, according to participants, is most known for placing legal restrictions on contacting employees and expecting them to work beyond their legal work hours to prevent employers from taking advantage of employees and encouraging them to be accessible 24 hours a day, which was happening in some cases according to many participants placing further stress on female leaders (Participant 1). The term “disconnecting from work, is defined to mean not engaging in work-related communications, including emails, telephone calls, video calls, or the sending or reviewing of other messages, to be free from the performance of work” (*Working for Workers Act, 2021*, 2021). Participant 2 shared, “We started last Christmas in 2022, and then we held it permanently; there are no emails after hours. And then, we were already prepared when Bill 27 came into effect. We were very ready for it. And we created a culture where people knew there was on time and off time.”

Despite the barrier female leaders with children experienced during the pandemic, the widely held belief by all participants is that female leaders, particularly those with children or other family responsibilities such as aging parents for example, will benefit from the new flexible hybrid workplace model, allowing them to take achieve a strong balance between work–life. For example, Participant 3 said, “I think COVID has been challenging for women in general because we saw them take on more responsibilities,

and as a result, they're the first ones to leave their jobs. But I think the new way of working is better because you need less childcare. It's more flexible. So, I think it's good." The increased flexibility, according to many participants, does help to offset some of the barriers participants shared and are discussed in Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid. For example, Participant 11 shares a firsthand experience, explaining, "For me, personally, it was, like, it couldn't have been better because I had a 2-year-old at home; she went to daycare, but working from home at that time was amazing because I remember having to commute to the office. I used to work at a mining company where we had to wear suits. This has been a complete shift, working in my Lulu's and breastfeeding with my camera off, so yes, it has been completely different. But for me, it was very refreshing and a welcome change."

Looking at Theme 11 from a different perspective, some findings also tell another story. During the beginning of the pandemic that required leaders to operate in a purely remote operating structure, Participant 3 and Participant 6 shared their similar observations that leaders and followers both benefited from increased flexibility that did allow for initially, in many cases, a better work–life balance overall internally, but over time much of the extra time saved from commuting, for example, has now been accounted for speaking to the recognition that although work–life is better with a hybrid model, this may not be the case for everyone as many have filled that time with other activities causing more stress on female leaders (Participant 5); which further supports the interconnected barriers identified in Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid and Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders

Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid. Participant 6 said, “I’m seeing people get more intentional about their happiness. And that means different things for different people.” She continued, “So, for some people, it means career growth; for some people, it means a level of balance; it means engagement in other activities that they find fulfilling,” pointing to the reality that achieving a work–life balance is highly subjective and personal.

**Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid.** This theme speaks to the importance of intentionality when it comes to taking steps to overcome the barrier found in Theme 7: Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Career Growth for Female Leaders in Hybrid, but taking intentional actions to create increased changes of new opportunities for serendipitous to arise, by intentionally taking actions to increase the chances of being in the right place, at the right time, and connecting with the right individuals. Participant 8 reflects what many study participants spoke about during their interview: the importance of intentionality when creating purpose-driven opportunities for career growth to emerge by saying, “You must be much more intentional about what you’re discussing. I find that the serendipitous discoveries don’t happen on Zoom, but I wouldn’t want to go back to 5 days in the office either. I appreciate having flexibility in my schedule and the ability to make time to speak to people” irrespective of where they are located. Participant 8 continues to share experiences and advice by saying, “Even if you don’t have great space, get creative, take a walk around the block, sit in the cafeteria in a corner with someone, and then use interstitial time well, like lunchtime if you have a half-hour break,

sometimes just getting to learn the office. I'll walk in circles, walk around, and try to bump into someone intentionally. Try to create the serendipity. Don't just wait for it to happen. Make yourself...put yourself into situations." Participant 5 also discusses the decrease in connections internally in the office, explaining how when working remotely, most meetings are intentionally planned, leaving little to no opportunities in some cases for serendipitously connecting with colleagues in other unrelated departments; for example, Participant 5 says "You have that in-person serendipity or serendipitous moments as well in the office. I think there's value in all of it...I think humans are extremely adaptable, and we can figure it out" recognizing that with intentional actions it is possible to adapt to the hybrid workplace model successfully.

Participant 15 confirmed the continued relevance and importance of the labyrinth of leadership (Carli, 2020) metaphor explored in Chapter 2 by recognizing that female leaders have broken through the glass ceiling with career opportunities available to them, but not without having to navigate barriers; as Participant 15 explains how "unrealistic expectations are put on women that I don't see put on men in the same way...While the baby boomers broke that ceiling around equality, it's now for these generations to define what that means. Now that we have, it's like now that we have a seat at the table...I see the advantages I have because I don't have children. And I think that bothers me even more because you shouldn't have to choose; women shouldn't need to choose between having a family and having a successful career." These barriers, according to participants, are what make intentional actions and the creation of serendipitous opportunities so relevant as female leaders are now faced with navigating a new flexible operating

structure, the hybrid workplace model that presents a whole new set of potential barriers some of which have been identified by participants in this study, and many more that many participants believe are still unknown but expect will emerge over the next few years as the hybrid workplace model continues its evolution and is studied.

Many participants shared advice female leaders in their organizations follow when seeking promotional opportunities, which aligns with the importance of female leaders taking intentional actions. The advice provided by Participant 16 was discussed in this section when speaking about Theme 6, which related to the importance of female leaders embracing the concept of a “framework called PIE, which stands for performance, image, and exposure” (Participant 6), which requires the intentional actions to create serendipitous opportunities for raising female leaders personal brand particularly when it comes to decision-makers. Participant 17 also shared a firsthand experience related to a model supported by the participant organization: female leaders who have a desire to be promoted must follow a set of behaviors adopted by partners within the firm called “The Five C’s that represent behaviors the following behaviors: Caring; Curious; Collaborative; Courageous; and Critical thinking” (Participant 17). According to Participant 17, “every partner meeting begins with a story that starts with a Five C’s story.” The Five C’s are an approach hybrid leaders could use to develop behaviors during their efforts to create and take advantage of serendipitous opportunities for professional growth. Participant 15 also discussed the importance of always showing up in person if you are the most junior person in the room and explained that showing up in person can make a “huge impact. I think that a lot of people are really taking liberties

with the work from home. And those who want to can use this flexible operating structure strategically to support career growth” (Participant 15). According to many study participants, intentionally creating serendipitous opportunities is a strategy that could help to compensate for the barrier discussed in Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid.

Participants also shared advice related to a fear many female leaders acknowledged having increased as a result of the pandemic, which is the fear of social awkwardness, especially when interacting in person, “I’d say is awkwardness only lasts for like nine seconds, if you can deal with nine seconds of awkwardness...introducing yourself to strangers is a great skill to have because you don’t know what you’ll learn about people” (Participant 8). According to most study Participants, what is essential for being successful is creating serendipitous opportunities in a hybrid workplace model that has limited in-person opportunities (Participants 5, 8, and 13).

**Theme 13: Technology Empowerment in Hybrid.** According to all participants, the use of technology in a hybrid workplace model is critical and the only way a flexible hybrid workplace model is possible. All study participants discussed how technology allows distributed teams to engage, collaborate, perform, and achieve high productivity levels. For example, Participant 6 explained how technology has made it possible to work productively in a hybrid workplace model, saying, “We could share screens very easily; we can be working on the same document together in some ways, almost more efficiently in a virtual world than if we were sitting together. I can show you how to do something on Excel together virtually.” Sharing a similar recognition of technology’s important role

in helping female leaders lead a team in a remote workplace and then transition to a hybrid workplace model (Participant 10). Participant 15 shared how “fascinating it was to have every meeting still on Zoom while in the office. It felt like working from home.” Thanks to the use of technology such as Zoom, Participant 15 was provided with “The opportunity to level the playing field and build an equal rapport with my Toronto and Calgary reports, which was easier because I was talking to them all in the same way. Undeniably, if I had started in pre-COVID times, I would have naturally had a stronger rapport with my Toronto-based reports, whom I would see in-person every single day,” versus Participant 15’s team located in Calgary, showing the hybrid workplace model has helped to normalize distributed teams.

Beyond the traditional technologies that study participants mentioned, the following software tools were found to be used by leaders to collaborate with their teams and employees and to perform work in a hybrid workplace model: Zoom, Microsoft Teams, including Teams Chat, Google Meets, Slack, and WebEx; other technologies were discussed by some participants that are focused on tracking employees daily activities, ensuring that they were working or that team members knew where their colleagues were at all times since it was impossible to walk down the hall of an office to see if they are there and what they are working on. According to some participants, these types of technologies helped empower female leaders leading in a hybrid workplace model, allowing them to gain greater levels of transparency into their team’s activities, information that can help to support each employee at an individual level based on their

needs, while also building a high level of trust, something also discussed in Theme 10: Need for Female Leaders to Modify their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid.

Starlink was also discussed by Participant 16 as being a technology that makes it possible for women to work from anywhere, opening new career growth opportunities. Participant 16 said, “To attract women, to attract minorities, to attract indigenous peoples that live in people in remote areas, there’s no way you can do it without having some factor that involves remote work. Connectivity’s getting better, so it’s like Starlink™ is out there now in these remote areas. To do that, you need connectivity, which is coming to remote areas.”

Looking now at some discrepant data regarding the opportunities for female leaders to succeed through technology empowerment. Participants 8 and 3 shared the belief, based on firsthand experience, that innovation is better achieved with in-person collaboration, which is an essential factor female leaders must take into consideration when leading a team in a hybrid workplace model. Participant 3 said, “The issue was a lack of innovation because you no longer hang out with nine people in a lab talking and problem-solving.” Similarly, Participant 8 explained, “I think we would have a lift in productivity and cost savings ideation if we were in person more. If you could rewind the clock to before hybrid and we were all in person, I think we would be better at solving problems quickly because that's done really well in person.” Another potentially discrepant data finding emerged related to the negative effects of Zoom meetings being held back-to-back and non-stop internal messaging (Participant 11).

Although Zoom is a valuable collaboration tool, many participants discussed the potential risks of too many videoconference meetings to female leaders' mental health. This risk was also confirmed in the literature review in Chapter 2. According to many study participants, technology has also negatively contributed to the barrier related to Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid, with the most commonly discussed technology concern among study participants being Zoom fatigue. Participant 16 said, "Now I never meet people in person, and everybody wants my calendar for Zoom meetings; when it first started, probably the first couple of months, I would get to the end of the day...and would complain to my husband and my kids about how exhausted I am and not know why. But it was because the Zoom meetings were all-consuming. Then the Zoom fatigue concept began to be discussed, and I was like, wow, okay. I'm not crazy."

**Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid.** According to all study participants and peer review literature in Chapter 2, transitioning to a hybrid workplace model continues to evolve. There is no one-size-does-not-fit-all as explained in Theme 2: Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model; female leaders are presented with an opportunity to re-think how to create distributed teams with employees dividing their time between working in the office and working remotely, which according to participants can mean working from home, working from a satellite office, or working from anywhere. During the transition and evolution of creating the optimal flexible operating structure, female leaders have an opportunity to intentionally and purposefully re-thinking and re-design the workplace

operating structure to create a culture of belonging, inclusivity, cohesion, shared understanding, and sense of community, creating a unified hybrid workplace where all employees can thrive (Participant 5).

Based upon the barriers identified in Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid, most of the study participants expressed the importance of ensuring that when female leaders are leading a team in a hybrid workplace model, it is crucial to ensure the team is cohesive, collaborative, engaged, and overall aligned with the organization's corporate culture. For example, Participant 11 shared a personal firsthand experience explaining how the transition to remote during the pandemic "contributed a lot to soloing between the original employees, and those of us who came in the organization during or post-COVID-19", due in large part to the strong in-person bonds that were established before COVID-19. Participant 11 explained how new employees felt at times left out when the original employees pre-COVID-19 would reflect on fun memories of bonding activities that took place in person, making her feel like she wasn't part of the team and recognizing the importance of the leadership role in fostering unified hybrid teams, a concept explored in more detail in Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid.

Based on interviews conducted in this study, there was a common consensus among all study participants that during the initial rapidly changing operating model at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders experienced a high level of stress, leading during a time when they themselves were uncertain about what the future would hold, as Participant 15 expressed "as a leader during COVID, it involved me trying to help my

team through all that uncertainty when I didn't have any of the answers myself;" most study participants were pleasantly surprised to see the increased level of togetherness at the peak of the pandemic, leaders benefited from team member rallying to support one another, with many study participants sharing their personal experiences, being very vulnerable and open with sharing feelings related to leading during the transition to a hybrid workplace model. Some of the words used to describe this initial unity that female leaders experienced and continue to leverage according to many study participants, included shared experiences such as "we were all rallying together...it was all hands on deck" (Participant 2); "people were fantastic, everyone in the team lent a hand, we worked so hard... there was a lot of love and kindness, and everyone just doing their absolute best" (Participant 3); "we were trying to invigorate a sense of belonging and understanding" (Participant 4); the effort was made to create an environment of understanding and support; and "so we're going to get things wrong, but it was allowing that safe space for people to mess up and, but to be open and to listen" (Participant 5).

Many participants discussed the concept of humanization of the workplace, described by study participants as making the workplace more understanding, caring, and approachable. Many study participants expressed the belief that this approach makes it possible for female leaders to nurture the formation of a unified team more easily. According to several study participants, this humanization of the workplace began during the COVID-19 pandemic when team members could see into one another's homes, meet their children, and get a glimpse into the lives that previously had been primarily hidden (Participant 5). Participant 9 believed this humanization of the workplace has the

potential to create significant opportunities for female leaders leading in a hybrid workplace model to make the workplace “feels less hierarchical,” and Participant 15 shared how, as a leader, it was okay to encourage team members to be open and supportive of one another by demonstrating empathy.

Participant 15 provided a firsthand experience of vulnerability and taking a very human approach to lead during change by telling her team, “I’m not doing so hot today.” Participant 15 explained how this was an example of how she was “being vulnerable and sharing with my team when I wasn’t okay.” She also let her team know, “I’m here for you. But if I seem off, it’s because we’re all going through the different waves; I made the decision to share that because I wanted them to know that it was okay not to be okay all the time” (Participant 15). Participant 5 recognized that “we’re moving more towards a sense of community and seeing how that works because the old system doesn’t serve us anymore.” According to most study participants, the future enables female leaders to create new approaches to leading teams in the hybrid workplace model that places employees and their needs at the heart of the structure, according to many study participants. Participant 5 clearly believes that the future of building strong teams involves “treating human beings as human beings... Yeah, the future is female,” implying that female leaders can embrace leading as their authentic selves (Participant 5).

**Theme 15: Embrace of Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid.** Knowledge is confirmed by study participants who provided insightful examples of the benefits and needs to intentionally adopt feminine leadership traits and soft skills as a leader supporting their team during the pandemic and transition

to a hybrid workplace model, such as the ability to be authentic, self-awareness, intuitive, intrinsically motivated, an active listener, empathetic, inclusive, compassionate, relationship building, collaborative, transparent communicator, resilient, adaptable, emotionally intelligent, and capable of inspiring and motivating others. The feminine leadership traits and soft skills align with applying a Situational Leadership® style, which will be discussed in the following section in Themes 17–23. Participant 5 stated, “When I see female leaders, you know, inhibiting these inherently masculine traits such as the concept of you eat what you kill, which is just not necessary,” there is great value and opportunity in female leaders who lean into their feminine leadership traits and skills, opting to be their authentic selves (Participants 5, 8, and 11).

Study participants shared several firsthand experiences of the importance of each one of these soft skills, including two participants acknowledging that employees during the peak of the global pandemic and high of stress and uncertainty in the workplace, employees gravitated more towards female leaders than male leaders, even in cases where the male leaders were their direct remote employees felt safer and more comfortable confiding in and seeking support, encouragement, or advice speaking with a female leader in the organization (Participants 1 and 7). Given the growing importance, the majority of study participants recognize the value of being an authentic leader during times of change and uncertainty, such as the pandemic and transition to a flexible operating model; female leaders have the opportunity to leverage and further develop, according to study participants leadership skills such as (a) empathy, (b) resilience, (c) adaptability, (d) intuition, (e) emotional intelligence, (f) caring, (g) encouragement, and

(h) inspiration while leading in a hybrid workplace model. Participant 5 explained, “I think females are better equipped to adapt to a hybrid model. We’ve had to do it our whole lives where, again, you just wear so many different hats at so many different times, so I think we are better suited. All of the things that, again, another term that I can’t stand is the soft skills, those are not soft skills, all of the things that we’re kind of again around the language surrounding that is there more feminine-attributed attributes like empathy and listening and all of these soft skills.” Similarly, Participant 7 believes soft skills such as “empathy is huge. I think sympathy is also huge; sometimes, I’m sympathetic and maybe not so much empathetic. I think it’s like a balancing act.”

Many study participants believe that being an authentic leader well versed in applying soft skills and feminine leadership traits to the team they lead in a hybrid workplace model begins with dedicating time to self-discovery and self-awareness, “understanding yourself and then understanding how you translate it into this world” (Participant 6) and then how to lead a team with the recognition that “I’m moving forward and in the world when we are all together” (Participant 6). In a firsthand account, Participant 1 shared during the interview an example of how employees, even those who did not directly report to this female leader, were drawn to her for support. Participant 1 said, “I can’t tell you the number of women who’ve reached out to me, especially knowing that I don’t have a young family by any means, but it’s young enough that COVID was tough. And I had days I was pulling my hair out, saying, “Wow, how do you do it?”

Employees across the organization saw Participant 1 as being an inspiration; studies show, as explained in Chapter 2, that female role models have a positive effect on inspiring future female leaders, therefore having the potential to help address some of the issues discussed in the barriers found in Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid. Participant 3, like many other study participants, believed in the importance of providing ongoing leadership training and support for female leaders while leading in a hybrid workplace model that continues to evolve, “I think there’s a big opportunity for education because education has changed so much. Now, we have access to micro-learnings, for example. You don’t need to show up in person. You can do online courses. You could do much more now in this remote world” (Participant 3), which most participants recognized as an opportunity for leader growth and development.

**Theme 16: Increased Access to Mentors and Support Networks in Hybrid.**

According to study participants, mentorship, and support networks have long been recognized as invaluable to female leaders at every stage of their career growth. The consensus among study participants was that access to mentors has increased for two primary reasons: first, the reduced amount of time required to mentor allowed to conduct mentorship sessions over videoconference, making it more desirable for them to agree to mentor (Participant 7). The second factor many study participants discussed is the widening of the pool of prospective mentors once again due to the ability to conduct mentoring sessions remotely, making it possible for female leaders and aspiring leaders to approach prospective mentors from within the industry and around the world (Participant 6). For example, Participant 6 explained how “There are true benefits; it now

means people on my team have mentors in other regions, which benefits them, but it's about seeking those opportunities; it's about being intentional," an approach that was also discussed in Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid.

Participant 4 shared a personal story of taking on a mentorship role during this time of change and uncertainty associated with the pandemic and the transition to a hybrid workplace model, explaining how "I have heard from staff that I've naturally become kind of take on a mentorship role, specifically with a lot of females in the studio in general, because I represent what they hope to achieve, partnership level, and I think they see themselves in me in that way, seeing what's possible. And because I am one of the more approachable leaders of our practice, and part of that is because I still see myself as an employee in many ways." Other stories of the value of mentorship programs include several pre-established programs designed for young professionals new to the field of accounting, with Participant 9 sharing a story about a program designed to help all entry-level professionals, but with a particular focus on females new to the industry to better support the pipeline as discussed in Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid. According to Participant 9, the mentorship program provides female leaders with the opportunity to give back by participating in mentoring some of these young professionals, which also has the potential to align with the female leaders' desire to not simply work but work with a sense of purpose according to several participants, which also aligns with Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid.

Participant 12 speaks to the importance of giving back by being a female leader who makes the time to mentor the next generation of female leaders, explaining, “I think it’s important for senior leaders to aggressively make themselves available if they’re going to be working remotely, I think that’s it is their responsibility. At our firm, we say that if you want to be remote, that’s a choice you can make, but you need to make an effort to still be accessible as a leader.” This example of Participant 12’s commitment to mentorship also speaks to the barriers discussed in Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid, as Participant 12 acknowledged the disadvantage the next generation of female leaders face when leaders who, according to many study participants in the past when operating in a purely in-office environment would naturally have been more exposed to hands-on learning and opportunities for ad-hoc knowledge sharing, and other different types of serendipitous career growth and development opportunities. Participant 11 shared a belief that female leaders, particularly those leading in a hybrid workplace model and facing many uncertain and changing dynamics, place themselves at an advantage for career growth if they establish a personal advisory group of professionals and industry experts that can help them navigate barriers, make difficult decisions, identify, and leverage opportunities that could lead to career growth. “Career growth-wise, while in a hybrid workplace model, I use an advisory group of people from different departments, almost like an advisory council, just to ensure we’re still delivering relevant things” (Participant 11).

The only discrepant case discovered related to Theme 16 and increased access to mentors was a lived firsthand experience shared by Participant 2, who explained, “I must

be more creative than I was in the past. There are not as many female leaders that I can have them pair with. I know I've had, for example, this past week alone, ten requests for mentorships, and I can't accommodate them. But there aren't very many female leaders in my company per se." After asking Participant 2 some follow-up questions related to the inability to fulfill the mentorship requests, it became evident that part of the problem related to an inability to meet the needs of females seeking female leader mentors relates to an issue with a leak in the pipeline discussed in Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid, which has resulted in a shortage of female leaders available to be mentors internally.

### **Research Question 2**

RQ2 was, What are the benefits of female leaders adopting a Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> style when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in North America while adapting to a new hybrid workplace model? The following nine themes provide answers to RQ2, with the first two themes, Theme 1 and Theme 2, focusing on the hybrid workplace model in the context of leadership offer context and the remaining seven focusing on the benefits experienced by female leaders transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model. Table 9 provides a summary of Themes 1–2, and Themes 17–23, including providing a high-level summary of each theme, and identifies the number of study participants who spoke about the theme, provided insights into their lived experiences, or shared stories of others in their organization who experienced the related theme, and in some cases also provided specific examples, experiences, or advice related to the theme.

**Table 9**

*Themes Identified Related to Benefits of Situational Leadership® Style Participants Experienced for Research Question 2*

Theme and description	No. of participants referencing the theme
Theme 1: The Future of Work is Hybrid for Many Knowledge Workers: A paradigm shift is taking place that is revolutionizing the future of work, with female leaders having to navigate leading during the transition to a new normal, the permanent adoption of the Hybrid Workplace Model, recognized as a flexible operating structure.	18
Theme 2: Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model: Female leaders are faced with the reality that leading the transition to a hybrid workplace model is a journey they must navigate, given that this new flexible operating structure is unique to each organization, department, and individual teams creating an environment that requires female leaders to be catalysts for change and innovation.	18
Theme 17: The Benefits of Taking an Individualized Leadership Approach Compatible with the Complex and Flexible Nature of Hybrid Workplace Models: The Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders the benefit of intentionally tailoring their leadership approach to accommodate each employee's specific needs, including their skills, capabilities, experiences, work environment, ideal communication style, personal circumstances, and professional aspirations.	18
Theme 18: The Benefits of Being an Adaptable Leadership Approach During Times of Change and Uncertainty: The Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders with a leadership style that is highly adaptable and resilient to dynamic, evolving, and changing operating structures.	15
Theme 19: The Benefits of Empowering Employees and Cultivating Trust in a Hybrid Workplace Model: The Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders with the benefit of being focused on supporting employees' success through empowerment and creating a culture of trust.	16
Theme 20: The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model: The Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders with a focus on establishing regular two-way communication channels between individual employees and the entire distributed team, ensuring a high level of transparency and message clarity while always being accessible to support employees.	17
Theme 21: The Benefits of Team Engagement and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace Model: The Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders the benefits of creating optimal conditions to nurture employee engagement and collaboration in person or by leveraging technology to collaborate remotely.	16
Theme 22: The Benefits of a Continuous Learning and Skills Development Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model: The Situational Leadership® style benefits female leaders by embracing continuous growth and skills improvement for themselves and their followers. It includes developing the soft and technical	15

Theme and description	No. of participants referencing the theme
skills necessary to succeed in an evolving hybrid workplace model, intentionally sharing knowledge, and nurturing a growth mindset. Theme 23: The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model: The Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders the benefit of leading authentically, trusting their intuition, allowing it to help inform decision-making and take strategic and intentional actions, creating a safe environment where all employees can thrive in a culture of support, encouragement, and understanding.	15

### ***Benefits of Adopting Situational Leadership® Style in a Hybrid Workplace Model***

This section explores the findings of RQ2 focused on identifying potential benefits associated with adopting a Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model. The study found that all 18 study participants supported the adoption of a Situational Leadership® style in times of change and when transitioning to operating in a hybrid workplace model, particularly one that continues to evolve, as confirmed by all participants, including Participant 1, who stated, “I would say we’re still evolving and we’re still learning what this hybrid office of the future is going to look like over the long term.” Study participants recognized the existence of numerous benefits associated with adopting a Situational Leadership® style for females when transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model. A total of two hybrid workplace model specific and seven general benefits, identified as Themes 1–2, and Themes 17–23, are discussed in this section; these benefits were selected based on the unanimous support of study participants.

According to most study participants, the Situational Leadership® style provides female leaders the benefit of intentionally tailoring their leadership approach to

accommodate each employee's specific needs, including their skills, capabilities, experiences, work environment, ideal communication style, personal circumstances, and professional aspirations (Participant 9). The seven benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model also, according to most study participants, may have the potential to help female leaders better navigate the barriers (Themes 4–10) and leverage the opportunities (Themes 11–16) that emerged in RQ1.

**Theme 1: Future of Work is Hybrid for Many Knowledge Workers.** This theme is foundational to exploring both RQs given that all study participants were required to have experienced leading knowledge workers, experiencing the transition from leading a team in a traditional in-office environment to one that is purely remote workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown to one that is a hybrid workplace model allowing employees to work a combination of in-office and remotely. Theme 1: The Future of Work is Hybrid for Many Knowledge Workers is something all 18 participants experienced and discussed during their interview, but this theme is related to RQ2. This theme supports the recognition that the hybrid workplace model is a new normal embraced by many companies, with a large portion of their workforce being knowledge workers, allowing them to have the best of both worlds, namely the benefits of working in-office and remotely.

All participants had a common understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic was the impetus for forcing the broad adoption of a flexible hybrid workplace model. Most notably, participants believed that the pandemic forcing companies to transition to remote

and then hybrid helped to change the perception about what is possible when it comes to flexible operating structures because working remotely, according to all participants, is possible, opening new potentials for the future of work. For example, Participant 16 speaks to this new perception of working remotely by explaining how “COVID made people understand that you can be productive in a hybrid environment. The things I faced back in the 1980s around the perception that all you’re doing is your laundry and watching TV while working at home went out the window during COVID. Even those who harbored that idea quickly realized that some people need to be in the office. Still, most people had to figure out a way to work, be productive, and keep their jobs.” Participant 12 shared a similar view, explaining how COVID-19 made it possible to reimagine the workplace and how “We have more choices now; we have more options. I don’t think that we’re ever going to be in a situation like it was during COVID, where we were mostly remote, but I know after I’d done that for a while, research started coming out, and they did prove that people working from home were more productive” (Participant 12) than those working from a traditional office.

It was interesting to see many participants, mainly those who work within companies that have offices in multiple locations nationally and internationally in some cases, acknowledged that they were early adopters of the hybrid workplace model well before the COVID-19 pandemic, creating potential opportunities to learn best practices in the future from these early adopters. For example, Participant 8 shared, “We were actually a hybrid before the COVID-19 pandemic. We already went from 4 days to 3 days. We basically never went in on Fridays. And I think we were 3 days even before

COVID. And then we went down to 0 days before then allowing people back into the office, which was very difficult.” Participant 4 also shared how her organization was also ahead of the curve, having adopted a hybrid workplace model before the pandemic, explaining how “because we have studios and we always work with teams in other cities, so we always had to have technology to be able to collaborate. The idea of collaborating remotely between a team in Toronto and a team in Calgary versus individuals collaborating remotely from 15 different houses is the same regarding the technology requirements and how our servers were set up. It was seamless on our end; we were lucky” (Participant 14).

All participants believed that the hybrid workplace model would be here for the long term, the new future of work, also described in the literature review in Chapter 2 by many scholars as the “new normal” (Newbold et al., 2022). This theme indicates that the hybrid workplace model is the new normal, according to Participant 7, who stated, “I think hybrid will become the future. I think hybrid is critical for a couple of reasons. I think number one is that you must be a hybrid model to be competitive and retain talents. Because I think many employees are looking for and desire to work remotely.” Participant 13 shared the belief in the hybrid workplace model being the new normal, explaining how “I don’t think you can go back because it’s been proven.” Participant 5 said that when asked if the hybrid workplace model will be the new normal, “it already is. And the employers that have figured that out are ahead of the game,” speaking to the desire by knowledge workers for the freedom to choose where they work best.

Further supporting the first theme related to the future of work being hybrid, all Participants discussed the demand from employees, including female leaders, for a desire to work in a flexible operating structure, placing further pressure on companies to adopt a hybrid workplace model as the future of work. Participants 6 and Participant 17 acknowledged that the hybrid workplace model allows for the best of both worlds. Participant 6 explained how some people within her organization “felt like the collaboration they get in-person is different and better than when they are online, and so again, it is about meeting the needs of different folks to make sure that everybody is as productive and as happy and as effective as they can be. Thus, that is where the hybrid model came in because it allowed us to have the best of both worlds.”

Participant 17 expressed the benefit of hybrids as they allow the best of both worlds in terms of flexibility and the opportunity to benefit from having people collaborate in person, as “there is a different energy in person.” When asked if the hybrid workplace model will be the future of work, Participant 15 shared a different view than other participants, stating, “This might be contentious, but I don't because I think a lot of the corporate world functions on relationships, and I do think that is something that's sorely missed in a remote environment.” However, Participant 15 also conceded that companies will never go back to business as usual and there will be some level of flexibility, sharing her personal belief that “I think that we will probably get back to a 4-day a week with people working from home on Fridays, which is exactly how it was before the pandemic.” Participant 12 acknowledged the value of some professions, such as the legal profession, of having a more significant portion of time in the office to

collaborate and support the next generation of female talent in the pipeline by sharing knowledge. Participant 12 explained her perspective on the flexible operating structure by saying, “I just think that people need to be open to the fact that what makes sense for them personally does not always make sense for everybody, and if we can let people figure out what makes sense for themselves everyone would be happier.”

Finally, findings within this first theme also emerged related to the impact that behavioral change has on the desire for a hybrid workplace model to become the new normal, the future of work for knowledge workers, making it essential for female leaders to understand how this operating model will affect their ability to advance their career, and how best to lead in this new operating structure. Participants 1 and 3 asserted that the behavioral changes that female leaders have made during the pandemic and the transition to a flexible operating model have made it difficult for companies to return to business as usual in a traditional in-office environment. For example, Participant 1 states, “It is one thing when it is just a behavioral change, but it is another thing when it now negatively impacts our pocketbook,” and Participant 3 shares insight into some of the behavioral changes by sharing how “It has been 9 months, and many employees have in some cases moved away from the office, adopted dogs, among many other changes taking place between the 6th month and the 1-year time frame during the COVID-19 pandemic when people got lax, started getting second jobs, benefited from making more money at home due to reductions in commuting and childcare expenses in some cases, all of that kind of stuff that involved changing their lives.” According to Participant 3, these changes that

took place while working solely from home in a remote operating structure have made it more difficult for employees to return to the office.

**Theme 2: Adaptation to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized in a Hybrid Workplace Model.** The second theme focuses on the transformative and dynamic nature of a hybrid workplace model structure, which is the foundational backdrop female leaders are leading during this transitional period to provide insight into RQ2.

*Hybrid Workplace Model and Flexibility.* The study participants experienced a wide spectrum of flexibility within their existing and evolving hybrid workplace models concerning how frequently employees are expected to enter the office. What was consistent across all study participants was the recognition that flexibility related to deciding when to come into the office and when to work remotely was essentially decided at a departmental level. All 18 participants acknowledged that their organizations had adopted a permanent yet evolving hybrid workplace model, allowing for a mix of in-office and remote operating structures. Still, in terms of formal academic level hybrid workplace operating structures, only three of the 18 participants assigned a formal name to their operating structure, whereas Participants 2 and Participant 10 stated that they describe their hybrid workplace model as being “remote-first.” According to Participant 2, “We are a remote-first company, which means essentially that almost all departments are working exclusively remotely except some groups,” whereas on the opposite end of the spectrum, Participant 10 shared how her organization pivoted from adopting a remote-first model telling employees “it is your choice” when to come into the office, to

“shifting to requiring people to come into the office a minimum number of days a week” (Participant 10) to achieve higher levels of productivity, collaboration, and performance. The third formal description of the type of hybrid workplace model discussed was by Participant 11, who described the model as being “distributed.”

According to Participant 15, “Every team has an anchor day,” a concept that ensures teams make the most of the day in the office for activities such as collaboration and team building. Most participants recognized that each department, based on its role, responsibilities, function, and the type of stakeholders they interact with regularly, plays a role in determining the optimal number of days in the office. For example, Participant 1 said, “We pride ourselves on being a client-first organization” and recognizing the need to consider employees’ needs for being in-office and other stakeholders such as their clients. Of the total 18 study participants, four participants acknowledged setting a minimum number of days ranging from 2 to 3 days a week, and the remaining 12 did not formally mandate a minimum number of days, allowing for a high level of flexibility and autonomy.

***One-Size-Does-Not-Fit-All in Hybrid Models.*** All study participants acknowledged that hybrid workplace models are complex operating structures with many different influencers, making it difficult to create one model that would meet the individual needs of all organizations or even departments within the organization; when describing the hybrid workplace model, many participants used the words “one-size-does-not-fit-all” when explaining the complexity of this operating model. Furthermore, according to Participant 13, “Employees are struggling, and leaders are also struggling

because there are just so many diverse needs...if we're trying to put cookie-cutter policies that apply to everyone, how do you create fairness and equity if one size does not really fit all..." According to Participant 14, the element of flexibility to work from anywhere on the employee's level of experience and expertise speaks to connections with Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup>, sharing her belief that the flexible hybrid model works best for "mid-career employees and that they know what they're doing. They don't need training. They probably don't manage many other staff, so maybe they're in a specialty." Interestingly, only nine out of 18 participants discussed having a formal policy. Those who have discussed a policy added the caveat that the policy allowed for acceptance and, in many cases, was not actually formally enforced, as explained by Participant 3, who had some employees upset when the hybrid workplace policy was formally announced, expressed their concerns about having a formal hybrid policy in place; her response to worried employees involved reassuring them by saying "No one is going to get in trouble. No one is policing this." Participant 8 acknowledged that policies for returning to the office are in place, but "there's no real enforcement" in place to ensure employees follow the policy, leaving the enforcement up to the individual team leaders to decide what is right for them at a departmental level.

Female leaders are faced with the reality that leading the transition to a hybrid workplace model is a journey they must navigate, given that this new flexible operating structure is unique to each organization, department, and individual team, creating an environment that requires female leaders to be catalysts for change and innovation is important according to many study participants. Participant 6 raises a point of caution

concerning creating policies for the return to the office, stating, “I think companies just have to be aware that as they’re making their policies, they want to ensure that they’re capturing the best talent, including women,” implying that policies that are too strict or structured could result in issues with talent retention or attraction.

*Evolution of the Hybrid Workplace Models.* All study participants shared a common belief that the hybrid workplace model of today is a new phenomenon that is continuing to evolve into a new normal for many knowledge workers. Participant 4 shared a perspective many participants shared when she explained, “I think that it’s hard to swing back to where we were, and I don’t believe we should. I’m a supporter of hybrid working for a few reasons, but I think it comes with its own challenges and some benefits. I think it will remain; I’m unsure where we landed...I don’t think this is the final stop.” Similarly, Participant 10 stated concerning the transition to a hybrid workplace model, “I firmly believe it is still a moving target,” acknowledging that female leaders transitioning their teams to a hybrid workplace model are still leading during a significant amount of change and uncertainty as the flexible operating structures evolve to their eventual final state sometime in the future.

**Theme 17: The Benefits of Taking an Individualized Leadership Approach Compatible with the Complex and Flexible Nature of the Hybrid Workplace Models.** Situational leadership study, according to study participants, provided female leaders with the benefit of being able to intentionally tailor their leadership approach to the individual needs of each follower based upon the current situation, the employee’s levels of experience and expertise, skills and capabilities, the work environments, desired

management, and communication style, personal circumstances, and professional aspirations. All study participants recognized the benefit of female leaders applying this flexible and adaptable leadership study, mainly due to significant change and uncertainty. This section looks at the first benefit to female leaders applying a Situational Leadership® style when leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model in Theme 17: The Benefits of Taking an Individualized Leadership Approach Compatible with the Complex and Flexible Nature of the Hybrid Workplace Models.

The COVID-19 pandemic, according to many study participants and academics, as discussed in Chapter 2, recognizes the global pandemic as being the catalyst that pushed record numbers of organizations with a high percentage of their workforce being knowledge workers to the permanent adoption of a hybrid workplace model having seen that a flexible operating model can work. Organizations have witnessed employees' strong desire to have a more flexible structure to the point where employees demonstrated a willingness to leave an organization in search of one that offered higher levels of flexibility and cost savings experienced by organizations, among many other factors. According to many study participants, employees also searched for organizations that took the time to personalize a leadership approach to meet their specific needs. According to Participant 8, "If you talk about the idea of maturing how we move into hybrid, you go from roles and mandates and days to understanding that humans behave differently and have different needs and roles of different needs," demonstrating how the transition to a hybrid workplace model is not simply a fad, but potentially the beginning of a more significant paradigm shift that places the needs of the employees front and

center (Participant 14). The recognition of the hybrid workplace model being adopted as a new normal that continues to evolve was discussed in Theme 2: Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model.

***The Benefit of Achieving an Employee-Centric Understanding of Each***

***Employee.*** During the transition to a hybrid workplace model, which, according to all study participants, is still evolving, employees face a high level of change and uncertainty, resulting in both academics and all study participants higher levels of mental health struggles, including according to Participant 4 feelings of isolation, increased cases of stress due to a lack of barriers between work and home, when working remotely (Participant 5); and new issues that emerged during the pandemic such as “Zoom fatigue” (Participant 16). Some of these challenges are also discussed in Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid, and according to the study, participants point to the need for taking intentional care being necessary for ensuring female leaders understand their employees and adapt their leadership style as required to meet the employees needs and to ensure the leader is creating the optimal environment where employees can thrive (Participant 14).

Achieving an employee-centric understanding of employees is critical to success and is fundamental to the Situational Leadership® style (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020). Participant 6 explains the importance of meeting team members’ needs during transition times experienced today within organizations that have adopted a hybrid workplace model. “You need to make sure that your team transitions, that they’re comfortable, that their needs are met, and the needs of everybody are different, and so it was very personal

and intentional to understand your needs and understand how we as a company can address them” (Participant 6).

Participant 6 also shared personal experiences applying the Situational Leadership® style, explaining how “We usually bring situational leadership, and the quadrants and making sure that people get the direction they need based on where they are in the quadrant. Based on our work, it doesn’t matter; depending on some people’s work, where you must physically be with somebody to show something, I can see how it really could matter.” Along with many other study participants, Participant 6 acknowledged the compatibility between the Situational Leadership® style and the hybrid workplace model’s flexible operating structure, allowing employees to work a mixture of working from the office and remotely from home or anywhere, recognizing Situational Leadership® style can adapt to changing operating structures.

***The Benefit of Individualizing and Adapting the Leadership Approach to Each Follower.*** The Situational Leadership® style aligns, according to all study participants, with the recognition that special intentional action was required during the pandemic and continues today as employees transition to understanding how to effectively navigate the evolving hybrid workplace, offering the benefit of making the time necessary to meet with all employees and gain a deeper understanding and form a more robust connection (Participant 7). Examples and explanations of the benefits of applying the Situational Leadership® style to understand employee needs better include Participant 8, who explained, “A lot of one-on-one conversations, weekly one-on-ones with all my reports

took place, which didn't change. If anything, we did more when we went home and then went back to basically once a week. I try to lead from a place of empathy.”

All study participants spoke of the importance of leading with empathy, which was also discussed in Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid. Participant 3 shared how, while using the Situational Leadership® style to understand employees' needs and connections better, “I learned a lot about people's health, which opened my eyes to people with different life circumstances than mine. I just assumed that people were like me. You know that whole bias of this is how I'm, so I assume everyone else is.” Participant 6 also shared a similar story of establishing intentional connections with employees to ensure that the optimal leadership approach was being used to meet employees' individual needs, explaining how, even as the leader, she was undergoing significant change and uncertainty during the pandemic and while transitioning to leading in a hybrid workplace model. Participant 6 explained, “It was like I was transitioning myself, but then making sure my people and the people who reported to me were okay, and I would say different people had different needs, and so while I was not specifically affected by young children, there were people on my team who were.”

All study participants agreed that the Situational Leadership® style offers the benefit of ensuring that each employee is supported based on their specific needs at that time, increasing the chances for success while also requiring the use of soft leadership skills such as empathy, discussed in Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid. An interesting finding came from Participant 17,

who explained how taking the time to really understand the needs of employees raised the question about equality versus equity, “we’re really finding that what people need is different, so equal equity and ensuring people have the opportunities they need to get to where they’re going is so important. I also think where people are in their career, it might be different the way you’re interacting with someone that maybe is 3 years in their career as you might interact with that same person when they’re 6 years along” (Participant 17). According to Participant 8, individualized leadership required constant communication to ensure that the optimal leadership approach is adapted based on the employee's current and evolving situation, something that many study participants identified as being critical given that the hybrid workplace model is new and evolving with not all of the bugs worked out, not to mention according to all study participants the hybrid workplace model itself is not a one-size-fits-all-model as discussed in Theme 2: Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model.

Finally, taking a closer look at Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid and Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid, the Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> style allows for individualized support for those who are facing not only obstacles professionally with career growth for example but also at a personal level. “I think it’s also challenging for people who have a lot of personal demands in their lives, and they’re trying to figure out how to balance everything while also being a high performer. So having enough empathy or sympathy to set up those accommodations and support them, but also making sure you’re delivering what you need to deliver” (Participant 7). When addressing the barriers found in Theme 4 and

Theme 5, adopting a Situational Leadership® style is a leadership style, a practical and adaptable approach to leading that believes strongly in the importance of authenticity and the use of soft skills such as empathy (Hakim et al., 2021), as discussed in Theme 15:

Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid.

Concerning Theme 4, the Situational Leadership® style also aligns with Theme 12:

Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous

Opportunities in Hybrid, from the perspective of ensuring employees are self-aware and purpose-driven Field (Hakim et al., 2021), offering further benefits to female leaders adopting Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model.

***The Benefit of Adapting to Generational Differences.*** A Situational Leadership® style with a high level of personalization provides the benefit of supporting female leaders in adapting their leadership style to meet the specific needs of each employee based upon generational differences, which many study participants shared during their interviews. For example, Participant 12 shared a story about a generational difference, explaining, “I think that a lot of the people I talk to who were a little bit older, who are a little bit less technologically inclined, were really struggling with how do you not like their attitude was just going completely remote...making the workplace more siloed intentionally, and my attitude was to try to make a remote concept as close to what was not remote as possible, not to really make it its own thing.” This risk of the emergence of exclusive sub-cultures was a concern shared among many participants, as discussed in Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid. The Situational Leadership® style offers the benefit of establishing strong relationships with

employees and supports the opportunities for supporting a unified corporate culture discussed in Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid.

In summary, the benefits identified by study participants of adopting a Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model that relates to Theme 17: The Benefits of Taking an Individualized Leadership Approach Compatible with the Complex and Flexible Nature of the Hybrid Workplace Models are found in this theme also, and may have the ability to help female leaders better navigate the following barriers:

- Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid
- Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid
- Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid

The benefits identified in this theme may have the ability to help female leaders better leverage the following opportunities while adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model:

- Theme 11: Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work–Life Balance in Hybrid
- Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid
- Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid

**Theme 18: The Benefits of Being an Adaptable Leadership Approach During Times of Change and Uncertainty.** The Situational Leadership® style offers female leaders the benefit of an adaptable, resilient, dynamic leadership style, perfect according to all study participants, for leading during the pandemic and during this transition to a new normal, a highly flexible and still evolving hybrid workplace model. This section looks at the second benefit to female leaders applying a Situational Leadership® style when leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model found in Theme 18: The Benefits of Being an Adaptable Leadership Approach During Times of Change and Uncertainty.

*The Benefit of Being a Resilient Leadership Style.* According to all study participants, the transition to a hybrid workplace model has required leaders to be highly resilient and adaptable to change, something that the Situational Leadership® style excels at given the fact that leaders applying this leadership style are constantly adapting their leadership approach to meet the needs of individual employees evolving situations (Aslam et al., 2022). One risk study participant identified relates to ensuring leaders are resilient and take quick and decisive action to combat the potential for exclusive sub-cultures to emerge, as discussed in Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid. Participant 11 admitted that the pandemic, coupled with the initial adoption of a purely remote workplace, followed by the transition to a hybrid workplace model, has “Contributed toward a soloing between the original employees based upon when you have hired, namely a difference between those hired pre-COVID-19, verse those hired during or post-COVID-19.”

According to study participants, supporting this resilience and nurturing of corporate solid cultures while leading a dispersed team has required situational leaders to leverage technology to empower their ability to individualize their approach, including, for example, how leaders communicate differently with each employee. The importance of technology in successfully leading in a hybrid workplace model is discussed in Theme 13: Technology Empowerment in Hybrid. Participant 1 spoke about the importance of technology empowerment, saying, “It was difficult for everyone, of course, it was. But it forced our business to evolve much faster than I think it would've without COVID from digitization and respectfully getting the regulators out of the way because we had to move to operate in more of a digital capacity.” Participant 8 also recognized that adopting a Situational Leadership® style while leveraging technology offers significant benefits, stating, “I’m probably much more accessible post-COVID than I would have been in the past. I think that would be one of the biggest evolutions of my leadership style.”

In summary, the benefits identified by study participants to adopting a situational leadership style in a hybrid workplace model that relates to Theme 18: The Benefits of Being an Adaptable Leadership Approach During Times of Change and Uncertainty found in this theme also may have the ability to help female leaders better navigate the following barrier encapsulated in Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid. The benefits identified in this theme may have the ability to help female leaders better leverage the following opportunities while adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model: Theme 13:

Technology Empowerment in Hybrid and Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid.

**Theme 19: The Benefits of Empowering Employees and Cultivating Trust in a Hybrid Workplace Model.** The Situational Leadership® style offers female leaders the benefit of a leadership style that recognizes the importance, according to many study participants, of empowering employees, supporting them in a specific way, tailored to their unique needs, in order to help them thrive, and provide them with opportunities to advance in their careers, such as the ones discussed in Theme 12 : Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid, which speaks to empowerment being central according to study participants to career growth. For example, according to Participant 14, female leaders empower their employees by supporting them in taking on new responsibilities as they grow their career and develop their skills and capabilities. This section looks at the third benefit to female leaders applying a Situational Leadership® style when leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model in Theme 19: The Benefits of Empowering Employees and Cultivating Trust in a Hybrid Workplace Model.

Participant 8 explained, “My style is to empower my teams...I gave every departmental lead their accountability.” Study participants recognized that a lack of empowerment and opportunity given to employees could result in obstacles such as those identified in Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid, with decreased opportunities to be seen if employees who are positioned for growth based upon the situational leader’s style are not seen and given opportunities in this new

hybrid model according to several study participant. Along with Theme 10: Need for Female Leaders to Modify Their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid which speaks to the need for not only the female leader who is committed to adopting a Situational Leadership® style to take steps to establish a high-level trust, but according to most participants, this responsibility is equally shared by the employees to earn the trust necessary to benefit from increased empowerment.

***The Benefit of Empowering Employees and Nurturing a Culture of Trust.*** This leadership style gives female leaders the structure necessary to establish high levels of trust (Wuryani et al., 2021); as Participant 1 describes when speaking about the importance of building trust as a situational style leader, “I know my team, I understand my team, and I can trust my team to manage their time, manage their responsibilities, and get the job done, then I am quite flexible in how it gets done. When we lose trust, we lose faith in their ability to manage that independently. That’s where I come in and say, okay, now I’m going a little old school on you; this is how it must be done until you can prove otherwise.” Participant 2 discussed how the hybrid workplace model has had a positive impact on establishing trust between the leader and follower by adopting a communication style that aligns with the Situational Leadership® style: “I do feel like that trust, if you will, has improved in a hybrid model because at least you’re having those face-to-face interactions and supplementing those relationships that you’ve, maybe, not had as close as you would have in traditional model beforehand” (Participant 2). According to Participant 6, it is essential when leading in a hybrid workplace model while adopting a Situational Leadership® style that encourages leaders to “be thoughtful

by asking yourself, for example, ‘Am I distracting everybody more than I need to be?’ So, I would say my leadership style is the same. Let’s find a third way to get there; I am all about how we will get there as a team, I am all about how we will need data-driven decisions, I will act like Mama Bear and protect my team at all costs.”

According to study participants, applying a Situational Leadership® style also involves maintaining strong communication channels together with regular progress reports, something that all participants spoke about being even more critical when leading in a hybrid workplace model as these reports offer insight into performance. Many study participants explained that employees no longer work together in person, therefore raising the question in the minds of many participants from time to time about their employees’ work ethic. Participant 1 said, “We’ve changed how we measure, simply because we have improved access to information...data analytics and that entire field has just blossomed,” providing situational leaders with valuable tools for supporting the growth of employees in a hybrid workplace model according to many study participants.

In summary, the benefits identified by study participants to adopting a Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model that relates to Theme 19: The Benefits of Empowering Employees and Cultivating Trust in a Hybrid Workplace Model found in this theme also may have the ability to help female leaders better navigate the following barriers: Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid and Theme 10: Need for Female Leaders to Modify Their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid. The benefits identified in this theme may help female leaders leverage the

following opportunities: Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid.

**Theme 20: The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model.** The Situational Leadership® style offers female leaders a focus on establishing regular two-way communication channels between individual employees and the entire distributed team, ensuring a high level of transparency and message clarity while always being accessible to support employees. According to many study participants, a lack of communication and opportunities for connecting in person can potentially negatively impact female leaders' career growth opportunities, as discussed in Theme 7: Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Career Growth for Female Leaders in Hybrid. Whereas, by applying a Situational Leadership® style, according to most study participants, there is value in consistent and transparent communications, combined with the intentional and purposeful strategic connection to critical networks that have the potential to create serendipitous professional growth opportunities as discussed in Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid. Along with the intentional connection with mentors and support networks, as discussed in Theme 16: Increased Access to Mentors and Support Networks in Hybrid, which are both strategies that Situational Leadership® style strongly supports, placing a high level of importance on taking intentional actions (Thompson & Glasø, 2018). This section looks at the fourth benefit to female leaders applying a Situational Leadership® style when leading

knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model in Theme 20: The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model.

*The Benefit of Consistent, Transparent Communications, Replicating the Concept of the Open Door Policy in a Hybrid Environment.* The Situational Leadership® style relies heavily on communications, including ensuring an accurate understanding of employees' needs, monitoring of progress, and identification of potential issues to offer individualized support, particularly in a hybrid workplace model where teams are distributed and have limited in-person connection (Participant 14). According to many study participants, the flexible operating structure has created a new opportunity for female leaders to build a personal brand with intentional actions. "The beauty of it is that it's social capital now, and your title doesn't matter. It does a little, but I've seen people in very junior positions, and it's incredible. And that was in the office, too, like your influencers, but just a different way of doing it now" (Participant 11), which is a concept supported by the Situational Leadership® style, the recognition that each individual has a different skillset and capabilities irrespective of their title (Thompson & Glasø, 2018).

According to most study participants, the benefit of adopting a Situational Leadership® style from a communication perspective is the recognition of listening as a leader. Participant 14 explains, "I think getting feedback on that too, that's one thing I've just started doing recently; I sent out an anonymous survey to my team to get feedback on how that communication is working and how they perceive the relationship. And I think constantly getting that feedback is important because otherwise you live in a vacuum and

do not really know whether what you're doing is being effective or not with your team.”

According to most study participants, two-way communication offers insight necessary to grow and improve. Another concept that the Situational Leadership® style aligns with, according to many study participants, that adds considerable value, particularly in a hybrid workplace model, is the importance of also fostering an environment as a leader that encourages the combination of “upward communication with the people above you, ensuring leaders understand your needs, what you're doing, what you're working on. And then that downward communication with your team ensures you understand where they're at” (Participant 14).

Most study participants discussed the concept of open-door policy, an approach participants explained as being essential and offering many benefits when applying a Situational Leadership® style, but this approach is, according to study participants, is a little more complex given the hybrid workplace model with employees working a combination from the office, remotely from home, or from anywhere. Participant 10 also discussed the connection between having an open-door policy and establishing trust in a hybrid workplace model, explaining how an open-door policy ensures support for creating a strong team, acknowledging that in this flexible operating structure, “I'm probably much more accessible post-COVID than I would have been in the past. I think that would be one of the biggest evolutions of my leadership style.” When one of the study participants was asked how an open-door policy is achieved in a hybrid workplace model, mainly when working remotely, the answer was “By answering your phone, and you answer your teams” (Participant 2), whereas another study participant describes it as

having a “Virtual door policy” (Participant 4) now in a hybrid workplace. According to most study participants, the Situational Leadership® style also benefits female leaders in maintaining an open-door policy grounded in the importance of frequent and ongoing two-way communication.

In summary, the benefits identified by study participants to adopting a Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model that relates to Theme 20: The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model found in this theme also may have the ability to help female leaders better navigate the following barriers: Theme 7: Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Career Growth for Female Leaders in Hybrid. The benefits identified in this theme may have the ability to help female leaders better leverage the following opportunities associated with adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model: Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid and Theme 16: Increased Access to Mentors and Support Networks in Hybrid.

**Theme 21: The Benefits of Team Engagement and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace Model.** The Situational Leadership® style offers female leaders the benefits of creating optimal conditions to nurture employee engagement and collaboration in person or by leveraging technology to collaborate remotely, a leadership style that values connection (Participant 15). According to study participants, female leaders adapting to leading in a hybrid workplace model can benefit from applying a Situational Leadership® style that creates opportunities for team building, shared

learning, and increased unity, something that, according to most participants, requires more intentional actions to ensure the establishment of team cohesion in this flexible operating structure. According to many study participants, a risk already witnessed among teams is the emergence of exclusive sub-cultures, as discussed in Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid. Several examples emerged from this study demonstrating dis-unity among new hires and those who have established roots within the company and relationships that began in person before the pandemic. In another example, Participant 2 spoke about disunity among long-time employees by saying, “I call it high school. So, there are some cliques. From people that were just comfortable always doing the same thing, I would categorize them mostly as employees that are not good with change.”

According to many study participants, female leaders can leverage the strengths associated with applying a Situational Leadership® style, such as conducting frequent check-ins with employees and teams to take the temperature of the situation and potentially identify any feelings of exclusion. For example, according to Participant 14, the ability to leverage the Situational Leadership® style is also conducive to leveraging two opportunities associated with increasing engagement and collaboration previously discussed, which include Theme 13: Technology Empowerment in Hybrid to support engagement and collaboration when operating remotely, and Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid. The following section looks at the fifth benefit to female leaders applying a Situational Leadership® style when leading knowledge workers

in a hybrid workplace model in Theme 21: The Benefits of Team Engagement and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace Model.

***The Benefits of Engagement and Collaboration.*** A benefit associated with applying a Situational Leadership® style to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model involves increased levels of engagement and collaboration. Participant 5 shares an approach to communicating that speaks to openness encouraged in a Situational Leadership® style, which encourages leaders to work with employees to choose at an individual level a communication style, the specific approach that works best for them and empowering employees to determine what communication and engagement style works best for them. Participant 5 says, “To keep them communicating, I don’t care how it is, I don’t care if it’s email, phone call, or passenger pigeon. I couldn’t care less. If people talk and share and whatever method they are comfortable with, I will let them lead that way.” In another example, Participant 3 shared an intentional approach this participant takes regularly: “I don’t know if people hate me for it, but if it’s a big meeting, and if we haven’t met before, I’ll kind of do a forming storming and norming exercise where there are a couple of different ones that involve asking participants questions such as tell me how you work, what do you value, what are you doing to celebrate the holiday?” Another valuable recommendation shared by many participants committed to the Situational Leadership® style involves requesting employees to turn on their cameras when participating in videoconference calls (Participant 3).

One challenge that participants believe the Situational Leadership® style may help with is the struggle to get people back to the office; by taking the time to understand at an

individual and personal level the underlying reasons why it is such a struggle get employees to want to come back into the office. This is a struggle for many study participants, with many admitting to having to resort to bribery by offering food, free t-shirts, and fun activities (Participants 6, 8, and 17). Participant 8 shared her views on this phenomenon, explaining how “nobody wanted to go into the office, and why do you want to sit in a mask and Zoom all day, Zooming people across the hall? It didn’t make any sense.” Taking a Situational Leadership® style approach to this obstacle has the potential to help improve in-person employee engagement by recognizing the importance of making an intentional effort to dig deeper into the root cause of why there is resistance to returning to the office, understanding what could change this perspective, and applying soft skills such as intuition, understanding, and listening to identify and address the needs of each employee; which may have a positive impact this problem (Participant 9).

In summary, the benefits identified by study participants to adopting a Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model that relates to Theme 21: The Benefits of Team Engagement and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace Model found in this theme also may have the ability to help female leaders better navigate the following barriers: Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid. The benefits identified in this theme may have the ability to help female leaders better leverage the following opportunities while adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model: Theme 13: Technology Empowerment in Hybrid and Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid.

**Theme 22: The Benefits of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and a Growth Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model.** The situational leadership style offers female leaders the benefits associated with embracing continuous growth and skills improvement for themselves and their followers. It includes developing the soft and technical skills necessary to succeed in an evolving hybrid workplace model, intentionally sharing knowledge, and nurturing a growth mindset. In the absence of a growth mindset and commitment to personal and professional growth, according to most study participants, organizations are at risk of experiencing a leak in the pipeline with female leaders not being supported with learning or skills development; every stage of the pipeline is at risk of female leaders not progressing along the career journey to senior leadership, or leaving altogether for employers that do support professional growth as discussed previously in Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid and Theme 7: Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Career Growth for Female Leaders in Hybrid relates to the potential for a decrease in career growth opportunities in a hybrid workplace model if intentional actions are not taken, according to most study participants. By applying a Situational Leadership® style, leaders have the potential to benefit from two previously discussed themes, including Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid and Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid. This section looks at the sixth benefit to female leaders applying a Situational Leadership® style when leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model in

Theme 22: The Benefits of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and Growth Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model.

***The Benefits of Continuous Skills Development, Growth Mindset, and Knowledge Sharing.*** The Situational Leadership® style believes in the value of continuous learning and development (Thompson & Glasø, 2018) and the power of learning new skills, according to Participant 1, who shared how the transition to leading a team remotely during the pandemic, followed by transitioning to leading in a hybrid workplace model was the type of value-generating experiences that produced learning situational leaders value. Participant 1 explained, “That transition was learning some new skills, different ways to manage people, and having the patience to understand that we are all dealing with heightened levels of stress, anxiety, a lot of children and spouses and/or partners and whatever it is in your working space. It was an experience.” When looking at soft skills development, which study participants believe is highly valued in the hybrid workplace model, Participant 5 stated how female leaders are well-equipped to thrive as leaders in the hybrid model, given female’s extensive experience juggling many responsibilities and recognizing the value in leveraging and continuing to develop feminine leadership traits and soft skills.

In summary, the benefits identified by study participants to adopting a Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model that relates to Theme 22: The Benefits of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and Growth Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model found in this theme also may have the ability to help female leaders better navigate the following barriers: Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders

in Hybrid and Theme 7: Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Career Growth for Female Leaders in Hybrid. The benefits identified in this theme may have the ability to help female leaders better leverage the following opportunities while adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model: Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid, and Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid.

**Theme 23: The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model.** The Situational Leadership® style offers female leaders the benefit of leading authentically, trusting their intuition, allowing it to help inform decision-making and strategically intentional actions, and creating a safe environment where all employees can thrive in a culture of support, encouragement, and understanding. According to study participants, authentic leadership is at the heart of Situational Leadership® style (Participant 5). The decision to not lead authentically has the potential to contribute towards the creation of barriers such as the following theme previously discussed, Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid, because leading in a non-authentic manner contributes to creating according to many study participants, challenges related to establishing and nurturing a strong personal brand having the potential to harm professional growth and advancement (Participant 5).

According to Participant 5, “It’s like they are bringing their whole selves to work, and how do we respect that and work that into the employee experience? So that’s

probably my biggest shift,” an experience shared by many study participants. Whereas embracing a Situational Leadership® style when transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model has, according to Participant 14, the potential to benefit female leader’s personal brand with a strong sense of self-awareness and purpose, including the ability to leverage benefits previously discussed in Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid, involving taking strategic, intentional, action on activities that have the potential to positively influence the environment to increase the chances of creating professional growth opportunities, and leveraging intuition to identify and act on opportunities. The following section looks at the seventh benefit to female leaders applying a Situational Leadership® style when leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model in Theme 23: The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model.

***The Benefit of Leading Authentically While Embracing Intuition, Intentionality, and Empathy.*** Adopting a Situational Leadership® style requires leaders to have the ability to be empathic and capable of “being able to see the world through someone else’s lens, I think, is what makes me a great designer, but also a good leader in that sense as well” (Participant 4). According to many study participants, leading authentically requires leaders to commit to self-reflection and self-awareness to understand at a deep level who you are, what values drive your decisions, and what gives you a strong sense of purpose (Participant 12). It is with a greater level of insight,

together with the ability to tap into intuition, that female leaders will be able to leverage those skills in helping others understand themselves better.

Participant 5 explains, “I found I can’t separate who I am from what I do, who I am is an extension of what I do. I just found a job and was lucky enough to get into leadership. I was also fortunate enough to be surrounded by a leadership team who accepts me as I am, but I’m also very transparent that I am the least thing from perfect.” The insight Participant 5 demonstrates is an excellent example of a leader capable of tapping into their intuition and acting when serendipitous opportunities come forward, something the Situational Leadership® style helps prepare leaders for such opportunities, according to many study participants. Several study participants spoke vulnerably about self-doubt, which may occur whenever they put themselves out there to grow and advance to the next level. For example, Participant 5 said, “We need to do a better job being kinder to ourselves, just be gentle, be gentle with yourself, and be honest. It doesn’t matter if you’re honest with someone at work or someone at home or whatever, but hopefully, you have a network where you can be in that vulnerable space to say, I’m not okay, to be kind to yourself and know that okay on most days is a victory” (Participant 5).

Being a Situational Leader® requires leaders to have empathy for others. Just as Participant 5 explains, it is essential also to afford ourselves that same level of kindness, understanding, and grace to make mistakes, to learn from those mistakes, and to grow from them, especially when leading in an evolving hybrid workplace model during a time in history that will be most surely be reflected on as being a paradigm shift in how we

work. Participant 14 shared an interesting perspective, explaining, “I think through the pandemic, we realized the women leaders, I think, were more able to lean into that intuition and really see where people were struggling and really understand where some of the issues were, especially with other female employees. And I think we need to continue to do that, like not let that go. As the pandemic is fading, we still need to lean into that intuition and that emotional side of us that is just as important as the logical side. And I think the two together make more of a well-rounded leader.”

Based on all the insight from study participants, it is clear that by leveraging Situational Leadership® style, leading authentically, embracing feminine leadership traits, continuing to develop valuable soft skills, maintaining a positive growth mindset and commitment to self-discovery, female leaders have the opportunity to influence the new future of work within a flexible hybrid workplace model that places the importance of working towards a shared purpose that positively impacts all involved moving toward a radically collaborative mindset and a unified hybrid workplace where female leaders can thrive at all levels of leadership.

In summary, the benefits identified by study participants to adopting a Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model that relates to Theme 23: The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model found in this theme also may have the ability to help female leaders better navigate the following barriers: Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid. The benefits identified in this theme may have the ability to help female leaders better leverage the following opportunities while adopting a

Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model: Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid.

### Summary

I sought to answer two RQs geared toward understanding the lived experiences of female leaders of knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model. Chapter 4 provided insight into the research setting, participant demographics, data collection, and data analysis strategies as well as evidence of trustworthiness. The chapter concluded with a discussion of study results. The two RQs explored in this study were

RQ1: What are female leaders' lived experiences with identifying new barriers and opportunities they must navigate when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada, to adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

RQ2: What are the benefits of female leaders adopting a Situational Leadership® style when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada while adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

This study involved conducting one-on-one interviews with 18 participants. Chapter 4 explained how the results of this study initially generated 147 initial codes, which were refined to a critical codes framework including a total of 52 codes (29 codes associated with RQ1 and 23 codes associated with RQ2), with connections to 23 themes (14 themes associate with RQ1, and nine themes associate with RQ2) providing answers to both RQs. The themes that emerged from the data and provided answers to both RQ1

and RQ2 have the potential for direct and indirect interconnections with the themes found within the foundational hybrid workplace model, opportunities, and benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style, having the potential to help overcome or address potential barriers identified in this study.

All 23 themes are supported and clarified using verbatim quotes from the study participants. All data created during this study has a high depth of trustworthiness. It is important to acknowledge that during all the semi-structured one-on-one interviews, all participants were eager to share their lived experiences and felt comfortable with being vulnerable, open, and honest. All study participants expressed a recognition of the importance of conducting studies such as this one, given its potential to create new knowledge that has the potential to support female leaders in the workplace, particularly given the paradigm shift and level of uncertainty around what affects the hybrid workplace model will have on the gender gap and gender equality in the workplace. In the next section, Chapter 5 summarizes and interprets the data findings gathered during the study, outlines limitations discovered to the study, presents future research and future practice recommendations, shares limitations to the study at an individual, organizational, societal, and policy level of social change, and discusses final study conclusions.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenology qualitative study was to focus on understanding and describing through the exploration of lived experiences any potential new barriers and opportunities female leaders must navigate when transitioning from leading in a purely remote workplace during COVID-19 to leading in a permanent hybrid workplace model, along with understanding and describing any potential benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style. The primary data collected consisted of data captured from conducting in-depth semi-structured one-on-one interviews with female leaders from Toronto, Canada, who hold mid-level or senior-level management positions and lead in a hybrid workplace model with a minimum of five direct reports. The intent of this study was to fully understand the essence of the female leader participant's perceived lived experiences and generate new insights that have the potential to add to the existing body of knowledge related to how female leaders can advance their careers, create new growth opportunities, and gain a greater understanding of how organizations can achieve greater levels of gender equality in the workplace, hence working towards closing the gender gap and creating an environment where everyone can thrive. In this next section, Chapter 5 begins by summarizing and interpreting the critical findings discovered in this study, then identifying some of the study's limitations, presenting recommendations for future research, and concluding by highlighting potential implications for positive social change.

This study focused on exploring two RQs by applying a thematic analysis of all the qualitative data collected, resulting in the emergence of 147 initial codes, which were

refined through an iterative data analysis process, resulting in a total of 52 critical codes included in the final code framework, of which 29 codes are related to answering RQ1, and 23 codes associated with answering RQ2. The 14 themes discovered in RQ1 provide a deep level of understanding of new barriers and opportunities that female leaders must navigate when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada, to adapting to a hybrid workplace model. Beginning with a theme that provides insight into the hybrid workplace model relevant to both the barriers and opportunities in RQ1 that female leaders had to navigate when transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model, included

- Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid
- Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid
- Theme 6: Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid
- Theme 7: Career Advancement Obstacles and Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Aspiring Female Leaders in Hybrid
- Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid
- Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid
- Theme 10: Need for Female Leaders to Modify Their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid

Opportunities in RQ1 that female leaders had to navigate when transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model, included

- Theme 11: Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work–Life Balance in Hybrid
- Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid
- Theme 13: Technology Empowerment in Hybrid
- Theme 14: Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid
- Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid
- Theme 16: Increased Access to Mentors and Support Networks in Hybrid

The nine themes were discovered in RQ2 provide a deep level of understanding of the benefits of female leaders adopting a Situational Leadership® style when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment to leading in a hybrid workplace model. Two themes emerged in RQ2 that provide insight into the hybrid workplace model relevant to the Situational Leadership® style: Theme 1: The Future of Work is Hybrid for Many Knowledge Workers and Theme 2: Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model. The benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style associated in RQ2 included

- Theme 17: The Benefits of Taking an Individualized Leadership Approach Compatible with the Complex and Flexible Nature of the Hybrid Workplace Models

- Theme 18: The Benefits of Being an Adaptable Leadership Approach During Times of Change and Uncertainty
- Theme 19: The Benefits of Empowering Employees and Cultivating Trust in a Hybrid Workplace Model
- Theme 20: The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model
- Theme 21: The Benefits of Team Engagement and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace Model
- Theme 22: The Benefits of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and Growth Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model
- Theme 23: The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Having conducted a thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered from 18 one-on-one semi-structured interviews with female leaders who have lived experience transitioning from leading a team in a traditional in-office environment to a hybrid workplace model (see Appendix F for the interview questions), study findings resulted in the emergence of 23 themes. Themes 3–6 answer RQ1 by identifying barriers and opportunities female leaders have experienced when transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model. Themes 1–2, and Themes 17–23, answer RQ2 by uncovering some of the benefits female leaders have experienced applying the Situational Leadership® style when transitioning to leading in a hybrid workplace model.

Having conducted a thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered from 18 one-on-one semi-structured interviews with female leaders who have lived experience transitioning from leading a team in a traditional in-office environment to a hybrid workplace model (see Appendix F for the interview questions) resulted in the emergence of 23 themes with 14 themes answering RQ1 and nine themes answering RQ2. Chapter 4 of this study focused on a detailed presentation of data findings and analysis of all 23 themes; in contrast, this section of Chapter 5 presents the results of the research study data findings analysis against the literature review presented in Chapter 2, identifying where data findings confirm existing knowledge, disconfirm existing knowledge, and extend existing knowledge in the discipline and scholarly peer-reviewed literature.

Beginning with identifying data findings that confirm existing knowledge, this study's findings strongly confirmed knowledge within the discipline, and scholarly peer-reviewed literature supports all the themes presented in this study. Four of the 23 themes emerged as significant findings and strong confirmation of knowledge, with all 18 study participants sharing experiences, insights, and knowledge supporting the findings in the Chapter 2 literature review. The following four themes stood out as being a priority and of great importance to female leaders and gender equality in the workplace based upon the number of responses from study participants providing valuable data such as firsthand accounts of personal experiences, including Theme 2: Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model; Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid; Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid; and Theme 23: The Benefits

of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and Growth Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model.

Beginning with Theme 2: Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model knowledge is confirmed by all 18 study participants as they all recognize that the future of work for many knowledge workers is hybrid, sharing the common recognition that that one-size-does-not-fit-all when it comes to the specific operating structure of a hybrid workplace model. Study participants confirm existing knowledge by sharing insight into their organizations, confirming that the hybrid workplace model they are currently implementing is still evolving and adapting to their specific needs and is, in many cases, different even within the company at departmental levels, depending on the needs. Participant 14 explained how some departments and specific individuals can adopt a flexible operating structure more than others, depending on their specific roles, responsibilities, and need to connect in person with other team members, customers, or clients. For example, those in an administrative role have a low level of flexibility to work remotely as they are client-facing, whereas those roles such as sales have a higher level of flexibility, given their need to divide their time between working in the office with their teams, and remotely meeting in-person with clients and prospects, confirming that one-size-does-not-fit-all even within each organization.

Participant 1 explains how the hybrid workplace model that has become the norm for many knowledge workers is not a one-size-fits-all operating structure. The reality is that many factors must be taken into consideration when designing a flexible operating

structure. The ideal hybrid workplace operating structure depends on a number of factors such as the individual roles and responsibilities, level of collaboration required, specific customer or client needs, the corporate culture, and any potential mandates established by corporate head offices, in some cases mandates driven by other countries (Participant 8), and the overall percentage of the organization comprised of knowledge workers capable of operating from anywhere verse those with flexibility restrictions such as factory workers that must perform their role in-person (Participants 1, 2, and 8).

Another finding that emerged from the data is the discovery that most participants acknowledged during the interview the difficulty of getting people to return to the office. The struggle to attract employees back to the office has led many participants to resort to bribing employees to make a presence in the office with food and fun activities, a finding also discussed in peer-reviewed literature. According to Participant 1, employees have become accustomed to the freedom of working from home, and it is a struggle to encourage them to come back to the office, describing some employees as having become “somewhat spoiled.” Participant 8 shared a similar experience, admitting to having to “bribe them with sweatshirts, and still only half of the people come into the office with the other half on Zoom.”

Knowledge is confirmed in Theme 9: Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid as it relates to employees facing mental health issues that increased at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly during the initial lockdown phase, with many employees experiencing feelings of isolation, loneliness, Zoom fatigue, burnout, and stress connected to the change and uncertainty (Participants

5, 8, 14, and 16). According to Participant 15, who shared a firsthand account of experiencing Zoom fatigue, this level of exhaustion is due to being in back-to-back Zoom meetings the entire day. The number of back-to-back meetings via video conference is something that worsened during the pandemic and the transition from remote to hybrid; this is an issue many participants recognized as a contributor to poor mental health (Participant 16). Participants believe the hybrid workplace model can have a significant mental health impact and must be intentionally managed as it evolves (Participants 6, 7, and 15).

This spite in cases of mental health struggles has led many female leaders to make the difficult decision to reduce their participation in the workforce by transitioning to a part-time position, quitting their jobs to accept positions that allow for a purely remote operating structure, taking a leave of absence, retiring early, or simply leaving the workforce altogether. This reduced participation in the workforce by female leaders is negatively affecting the leakage in the pipeline of female leaders and increasing gaps in gender equality in the workplace. Participants 9, 14, and 17 discussed the recognition of a leak in the pipeline of female leaders and are working within organizations committed to implementing solutions that support female leaders' career progression and overall retention.

Now exploring Theme 15: Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid, knowledge is confirmed by all study participants who provided insightful examples of the benefits and needs to intentionally adopt soft skills as a leader supporting their team during the pandemic and transition to a hybrid workplace

model. Embracing soft skills such as authenticity, self-awareness, intuitive, intrinsic motivation, active listening, empathy, inclusion, compassion, relationship building, trust building, collaboration, transparent communication, resiliency, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and inspiration and motivation. All study participants acknowledged the importance of soft skills during the transition to a hybrid model. Study participants shared several firsthand experiences of these soft skills, including two acknowledging that employees during the peak of the global pandemic, during a time of high stress levels and uncertainty in the workplace, led many employees to naturally gravitate more toward female leaders than male leaders (Participants 5 and 12). According to many participants, even employees who were not direct reports and, in some cases, not even from the same department where their direct reports were male leaders, often experienced female leaders coming to them in search of support as they felt safer and more comfortable confiding in and seeking support, encouragement, or advice speaking with a female leader in the organization (Participants 5 and 12).

According to Participant 5, female leaders have a strategic advantage when it comes to their ability to leverage “more feminine-attributed attributes like empathy and listening,” continuing to explain how using the term soft skills sounds too weak in comparison to the important role they play especially in today’s new hybrid workplace model. Participants 8 and 11 also spoke of encouraging their team members to be more empowered by taking responsibility for being self-motivated and self-directed while also increasing the amount of work delegated to employees capable of handling increased levels of responsibility and desire to advance their careers. Many participants mentioned

the importance of resisting the potential urge to micromanage when transitioning to leading a team in a hybrid workplace model due to the decreased visibility into seeing what employees are working on, explaining how micromanagement with limited levels of empowerment is “a very disheartening and disengaging leadership style” (Participant 8).

Finally, knowledge is confirmed in Theme 23: The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model, beginning with the recognition by all participants that working from home has provided a window into the personal lives of their employees and even senior executives. This insight into employees’ personal lives in the past is something that you would have never encountered. For example, Participant 17 said, “We can see into one another’s homes, and we can meet one another’s children or pets, presenting an opportunity for the workplace to become more humanized,” creating an environment where authentic leadership is encouraged and valued in helping to support employees during stressful and uncertain times as described by many study participants such as Participant 11.

According to Participant 17, “I think I heard a human resources consultant from the United States use the term humanization for the first time,” continuing to explain the shift experience as organizations transition to a hybrid workplace model that places a greater emphasis on valuing employees caring about them at a professional and personal level as people. Participant 17 explained how, as a new normal in flexible operating structures evolves, organizations have an opportunity to re-think and re-create the workplace, ensuring there is a greater focus on better supporting employees how the hybrid workplace models evolve in the future will either “build loyalty or just kill it”

(Participant 17). Participant 11 also spoke about the important role of humanization in the workplace of the future, explaining how achieving a humanized environment, one that genuinely cares about employee's well-being and career success, requires authentic leadership and encouragement of vulnerability, which also "builds so much more than any sort of leadership framework would" (Participant 11). Embracing vulnerability by being yourself was strongly encouraged by all study participants, with Participant 5 sharing a very personal story about having to take a leave of absence at the peak of the pandemic and how transparent and honest she was about openly sharing her need to take this break for her own mental health and well-being with her team and the entire company. This level of vulnerability allowed others in her company also to feel comfortable enough to openly share their own struggles and seek help for challenges they are battling personally (Participant 5).

Many participants confirmed existing knowledge surrounding the connection between authenticity, building trust, and creating a sense of psychological safety in the new flexible operating structure of the future. For example, Participant 6 provided an example of establishing psychological safety that relies on consistently leading regardless of where the leaders are physically working. "I must be the same person on Tuesday and Wednesday when I'm in the office as I am on Thursday when I'm virtual, and then how I communicate should be consistent" (Participant 6). Several study participants also confirmed the labyrinth of leadership metaphor as being a more accurate description of the journey female leaders must navigate when leading in a hybrid workplace model (Participant 11). Participant 15 shared insight into the "unrealistic expectation put on

women” when it comes to balancing work and life, requiring female leaders to make difficult decisions such as “Do I want to get pregnant, or do I want to get promoted first?” (Participant 6).

Taking a look at disconfirmed knowledge, findings from this study largely support the existing knowledge except for two of the findings discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, which include the belief by some scholars that there is a need for the creation of an entirely new leadership theory for those leading in a hybrid workplace model; the growing importance of e-leadership theory in the context of a hybrid workplace model; and the relatively broad, generalized, and inconsistent use of language to describe the different types of hybrid workplace models emerging as the new normal for knowledge workers. The first disconfirmation of knowledge found in this study relates to the call from some scholars for a new leadership theory that aligns specifically with the hybrid workplace model of the future. At this point in the transition to a new flexible operating structure for many knowledge workers, findings from this study do not support the need for a new type of leadership style. Not one study participant mentioned the need for an entirely new leadership theory for a hybrid workplace. All study participants, in fact, stated that they did not have to change their leadership style but acknowledged the need to adjust and adapt their existing approach to leading, strongly favoring the use of the Situational Leadership® style.

Findings from this study showed that all participants stated that they did not need to change their leadership style; for example, Participant 4 said, “My leadership actually didn’t change in any capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic, but I do check in on staff,

regularly to see how they're doing regardless of the current context of hybrid, and I think that's something that I did even prior." All participants overwhelmingly acknowledged the benefits of applying a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model, a style that according to many participants came naturally; and also spoke of the need to rely on leadership skills that align with e-leadership theory, particularly when transitioning to the purely remote model at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, and during the transition to a new flexible hybrid workplace model. Participants intentionally embraced critical elements of Situational Leadership® style, such as prioritizing checking in with employees, gaining a more robust understanding of the team members' needs, leveraging technology, and leading each participant differently based on their unique needs.

The second disconfirmation of knowledge relates to the literature on the e-leadership theory and the lack of one participant acknowledging the existence or importance of this leadership theory by the formal name of the e-leadership theory. Many participants recognized that they practiced some of the components of this theory when it came to leading team members when they were working remotely (Participant 14). Finally, the third is the intriguing discovery of an absence of formal terms used by participants to describe the specific type of hybrid workplace model, except for couple of participants who referred to her organization's hybrid workplace model as remote-first (Participant 2 and 11).

As a researcher, I find it intriguing that there is an absence of formal language to describe the specific flexible operating structure found in the hybrid workplace model,

particularly given the fact that existing knowledge and this study strongly confirm that one-sizes-does-not-fit-all when it comes to the formation of hybrid workplace models. The potential for the lack of common language around how leaders describe the specific hybrid operating structure could further contribute to the uncertainty that female leaders will be required to navigate when leading a team through this change and when seeking career growth and advancement. Despite the emergence of new terminology describing the different types of hybrid workplaces emerging from scholars and practitioners, as presented in the Chapter 2 literature review, study participants are not using this new language to describe their unique operating models. Instead of using the new terminology that emerged regarding the different types of hybrid workplace models during the interview, participants connected and discussed the broad concept of the hybrid workplace. Participants spoke in general terms about the need to focus on helping to lead their teams in this new normal, a flexible operating structure that continues to change and evolve, creating a state of uncertainty leaders must navigate (Participants 4 and 14).

I also found interesting as a researcher, the data findings that emerged created a pattern concerning interconnections not only between those found in the findings of RQ1, which speaks to opportunities discovered in this study having the potential ability to help female leaders navigate the barriers uncovered; but equality findings from this study related to RQ2 shed light on the potential for the benefits associated with female leaders adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model potentially helping female leaders better navigate barriers and identify solutions for addressing the potential barriers found in RQ1. Several findings from this

study help to extend knowledge found within the discipline and scholarly peer-reviewed literature, included

- Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid
- Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid
- Theme 12: Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid
- Theme 8: Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid

Although Theme 4: Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid largely falls within the classification of confirmed knowledge, this study did discover some extended knowledge concerning the emergence of new barriers young female leaders face.

For example, Participant 6, who was actively pursuing a promotion that she did end up earning, felt that she had to work harder to show her worth and capability due to a perception by her superiors that she may not be mature enough for a promotion and may be too young because she still lives at home with her parents. It was difficult for Participant 6 to hide her living situation in a remote environment since she spent much of her day on videoconference calls, and she felt that this perception of her negatively affected senior management's perception of her capabilities because of her age. Participant 6 believed that had she been working in a traditional office environment, she would have come across as more mature as a leader as they would not have been aware that she lived at home, and senior leadership could have seen her more often dressed

professionally had more in-person opportunities to connect with the leaders. Participant 6 also believed that she would likely have had more opportunities to build a rapport with decision-makers during pre-established connecting points such as meetings and serendipitously meeting in the coffee room.

Participants also shared many stories of generational difference when it comes to the younger generation deciding not to aspire to partner levels in industries such as architecture, law, and accounting as they are not willing to accept the significant impact this decision would have on their ability to balance work–life, deep preference for many to not return to the office and work remotely as much as possible (Participant 14, 16, and 17). For some, this aspirational senior leader role contradicts their desire to commit to roles and companies that align with their personal and professional sense of purpose. This leak in the pipeline related to a decreased desire, according to participants of the younger generations, to advance to the partner level is forcing professional practices to rethink the pathway to partnership and, in one example, how the company promotes and encourages more females to aspire to pursue a partnership career growth track (Participants 4 and 6).

It is essential first to acknowledge that findings from this study strongly confirm with all participants agreeing and providing examples of the existing knowledge related to Theme 5: Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work–Life in Hybrid concerning an imbalance of non-paid household duties and childcare responsibilities. Female leaders also must take on even more responsibilities, adding further strain on work and work–life balance, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown periods; however, knowledge is expended with new experiences

shared by participants, indicating a positive shift towards greater equality at home (Participants 3 and 4). Several study participants shared their personal firsthand experiences with their husbands deciding to take a step back in their career progressions so that their wives could dedicate more of their time to be promoted to partner or accept a highly demanding senior leadership position. Results from this study contribute to a body of knowledge that continues to emerge, showing a shift in the mindset of the importance of supporting female leaders' career growth, requiring support not only from organizations but also at a personal level with support from family and community.

Extended knowledge discovered in Theme 12 – Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid relates to one of the most significant and consistent findings that emerged from this study, which is the decrease in serendipitous career growth and decrease in network development opportunities typically discovered when working in person and being at the right place at the right time. One participant describes serendipity as “random collisions,” according to Participant 10, allowing for new opportunities that could positively impact career progression to emerge. Most study participants mentioned during their interview the increasing importance of taking an intentional, meaningful, purposeful, and intuitive approach when leading in a hybrid workplace to creating opportunities for serendipitous opportunities for career growth and advancement to emerge more frequently despite working a combination of in-office and remotely from home or anywhere. The words and concepts of intention and serendipity concerning the hybrid workplace model and female

leadership are not great details in Chapter 2, peer-reviewed literature, with a focus on female leadership and the hybrid workplace.

Finally, extended knowledge was discovered in Theme 8: *Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid*. Several findings emerged from this study that shed new light on the challenges female leaders have been experiencing in the hybrid workplace model related to feeling a sense of belonging in the workplace, with one of the influencers being where you are in your career and the second being when you joined the company whether it was before, during, or post-pandemic and the adoption of a hybrid workplace model (Participants 4 and 7). Looking first at where you are in your current career, this study found that new females in their career, particularly those who are at entry level in the pipeline or just about to move up to middle management, were at a greater risk of being negatively impacted by the pandemic when the organization was initially purely remote and also but to a lesser extent the transition to a hybrid workplace model. Female leaders holding middle management or senior leadership positions were in a stronger position as they had already leveraged opportunities to embrace serendipitous career growth opportunities, such as those that take place because “running into people was a thing of the past hallway conversation” (Participant 3) and had created a strong support network.

Benefits from serendipitous opportunities include the transfer of knowledge, which can occur more naturally when given the chance to network and collaborate in person. Secondly, research showed that females hired during or post-COVID when the organization operated remotely or in a hybrid workplace model felt disconnected from

the culture (Participant 8). Different “clicks or sub-groups” were exclusively formed. For example, Participants 1, 2, 3, and 11 acknowledged the emergence of exclusive sub-cultures in the new hybrid workplace model, typically groups divided by the time they were hired and duration with the company, more specifically before or after the COVID-19 pandemic, older employees who are resistant to change, and generational difference with the younger generation that has just entered the workforce during the pandemic strongly preferring to work predominately from home, remotely (Participant 3). The research findings of all 23 themes that emerged from the data answering RQ2 are interrelated, as explained in the thematic maps (as shown in Figures 8–10) presented in Chapter 4 and supporting the existing literature review in Chapter 2. The succeeding section of this chapter identifies the study’s limitations, which offers opportunities for future research.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Five study limitations were encountered that may have impacted the findings of this study. The first limitation was the sample size of quantitative studies; this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study narrowly focused on a specific criterion for eligibility to participate in this study. Study participants included female mid-level or senior management leaders who lead teams, with a minimum of five direct reports who lead knowledge workers and had firsthand experience transitioning from leading in a traditional in-office environment to a hybrid workplace model within a company with an office in Toronto, Canada. The second limitation involved a limited focus on two RQs, with RQ1 focused on understanding the barriers and opportunities female leader

participants experienced leading in a hybrid workplace model, and the second question concentrated on understanding the benefits associated with applying a Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model.

Given the broad adoption of a hybrid workplace model to this scale with companies that have a large percentage of their workforce being knowledge workers is a new phenomenon, RQ2 explored in this study only provides a small amount of new knowledge that is required for the future to ensure female leaders understand all the potential implications this new flexible operating structure could have on their career and gender equality in the workplace. The third limitation focused on the broad range of industries recognized as part of the knowledge economy, including study participants from the insurance and financial industry, health care research industry, banking industry, consumer goods/retail marketing industry, architectural industry, accounting industry, technology industry, legal industry, and human resource consulting industry. The fourth limitation arises from the limited focus on only interviewing female leaders; consequently, this study is confined to the female perspective and needs more insights from the male point of view. The fifth limitation relates to participants of this study, who need to have a corporate-level commitment to formally adopting a situational leadership style.

All necessary steps were taken to ensure high trustworthiness throughout the study. This study was validated by conducting semi-structured interviews recorded using Zoom, transcribed by Scribe.com, reviewed and verified for accuracy, and using reflective journaling after each interview. While performing the interviews, where

necessary, I asked participants to provide further clarification or examples to ensure I obtained data that accurately reflected the lived experiences. Transcripts were also provided to participants the day after the interview was conducted for member-checking, allowing them ample time to verify and validate the accuracy of the data. Throughout the entire research study process, including the data collection and analysis stages, I regularly documented my personal reflections to ensure my personal thoughts and potential biases were separate from the data findings to ensure unbiased results and detailed annotated notes were taken during the analysis of each interview transcript. These limitations form the basis for recommendations for future research.

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations presented in this section are based on the limitations and results of this current study. The relevance of the study findings is not limited to female leaders at a mid-level or senior level, nor are they limited to a geographic location, or in many cases, even to only the female population concerning the findings associated with the benefits to applying a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model as the benefits of this leadership style are equally valuable to male leaders as well. This section presents recommendations for future research and practice predominantly within organizations whose workforce is comprised mainly of knowledge workers.

#### **Recommendations for Research**

Based on the findings from this study, I have identified five recommendations for future research. The future research recommendations focus on furthering the depth of

understanding of the potential effect the hybrid workplace model could have on female leaders' ability to successfully navigate potential barriers that may be prohibitive to career growth and advancement. Along with gaining a deeper level of understanding of the potential for new opportunities associated with working within a hybrid workplace model, female leaders may be able to leverage that to help them achieve their professional goals and aspirations successfully. At the organizational level, gaining a valuable understanding of how organizations can positively affect efforts to achieve gender equality in the workplace. Future research could provide greater insight into the ideal leadership style for female leaders leading in a complex hybrid workplace model that continues to evolve. The following section provides a description of the five future research recommendations derived from this study, including four associated with RQ1 and one associated with RQ2.

Future research recommendations 1–4 relate to RQ1. Recommendation 1 is to study the lived experience of female knowledge workers at all levels of their career journey, including those at entry-level, mid-career, and senior management preparing to make it to executive or partnership level to understand the unique barriers and opportunities they face in achieving career growth and advancement while working in a hybrid workplace model. Recommendation 2 is to understand career growth strategies for female leaders in a hybrid workplace model. Conducting a similar study but expanding the RQs to focus on understanding the strategies female leaders in a hybrid workplace model leverage to overcome barriers and successfully leverage opportunities for career growth and advancement.

Recommendation 3 is to explore industry-specific implications for female leaders in a hybrid workplace model. Narrowing the focus of a qualitative study to include only female leaders leading a team in a hybrid workplace model within a specific industry. The three industries based on my research would be most beneficial to focus on, given the struggles they are experiencing with a gap in female leaders advancing to the partner level, include the following industries: law firms, accounting firms, and architectural firms, given they are all facing a similar problem, but have distinctly different hurdles female leaders must overcome that deserve to be researched with a narrow focus on the individual industry implications.

Recommendation 4 is to broaden the study participant criteria to include the male perspective. Replicate this study and broaden the participant criteria to include various perspectives on female leaders in the hybrid workplace model, including the male perspective. Recommendation 5 relates to RQ2. I recommend narrowing study participants' criteria to trained Situational Leadership® style leaders committed solely to this leadership style. Replicating this study with study participants whose companies have formally adopted a Situational Leadership® style and trained all leaders on how to adopt a Situational Leadership® style to gain a greater understanding of the benefits of the Situational Leadership® style in a hybrid workplace model.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by creating new understandings and descriptions of the lived experiences of female leaders transitioning from leading in a purely remote workplace during COVID-19 to leading in a permanent hybrid workplace

model. The specific areas of focus of this study where this study contributes new knowledge to the field of female leadership, gender equality, and the hybrid workplace model within the knowledge economy including adapting to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model, navigating career growth and advancement in a hybrid workplace model, understanding new barriers and opportunities to navigate associated with the hybrid workplace model, leveraging Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model, effects of gender equality in a hybrid workplace model, and insights into the hybrid workplace model itself still evolving into the new normal. This study may offer benefits and insights to mid-level to senior-level female leaders leading teams of knowledge workers in organizations adopting a hybrid workplace model who wish to have a greater understanding of the barriers and opportunities female leaders face when leading in a hybrid workplace model, along with gaining greater insight into the benefits of adopting a Situational Leadership® style.

The findings from this study revealed that study participants did experience new barriers and opportunities associated with leading in a hybrid workplace model. Female leaders were required to overcome or leverage in their effort to successfully lead knowledge workers during the transition to a highly flexible operating structure and continue to advance or nurture their careers. Study findings also revealed seven benefits to intentionally adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading a team in a hybrid workplace model, knowledge that is valuable given the fact that all study participants shared lived experiences that confirm to one extent or another their adoption of a Situational Leadership® style to meet the needs of their teams, in many cases without

even recognizing that their natural intuitive approach to leadership fully aligns with situational leaders.

The findings of this study uncovered a need for additional research and support resources to help female leaders successfully navigate barriers and leverage opportunities that emerge from the transition to a hybrid workplace model. This study also identified the need to provide additional training and support resources designed to help female leaders gain a greater understanding of how they can leverage the benefits discovered from applying a Situational Leadership® style while leading in a flexible operating structure. Research is also required to support female leaders at all levels of their career journey by identifying additional barriers they may need to navigate and opportunities they may be able to leverage as female leaders strive to achieve career growth and professional development in an evolving hybrid workplace model, future of work. The following section provides a description of the 14 future practice recommendations derived from this study, including eight associated with RQ1 and six associated with RQ2.

Future practice recommendations 1–8 relate to RQ1. Recommendation 1 is to leverage new opportunities to navigate new barriers female leaders experience leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model. When navigating new barriers female leaders experience when transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model, leaders may have the ability, given the situation, to leverage new opportunities that emerge in this flexible and continuously evolving operating structure

identified in RQ1 of this study to overcome barriers, namely leveraging Themes 11–16, as shown in Figure 10.

Recommendation 2 is to prioritize and encourage the use of soft skills and the adoption of feminine leadership traits. Provide all leaders with access to training tailored to understanding how to develop and apply soft skills as a leader in a hybrid workplace model. Commit to providing continuous training and development grounded in an experiential learning approach to help female leaders and their team members practice the development and application of feminine leadership traits such as being (a) self-aware, (c) authentic, (d) intuitive, (e) empathetic, (f) caring, (g) intrinsically motivated, (h) an active listener, (i) resilient, (j) capable of trust-building and (k) inspiring others while leading in a hybrid workplace model. Purposefully connect the ability to lead using soft skills as part of the annual performance metric. Recommendation 3 is to take steps to increase the transparency of the pipeline of female leaders at every step of the career journey. There is a need for increased transparency and measurable insight into better understanding the current situation of the female leader's talent pipeline, identifying areas of strength and weakness, and creating practical strategies for preventing leaks and attracting female talent to the organization to strengthen the pipeline for today and the future.

Recommendation 4 is to gain a deeper level of understanding and insight into the emerging gap in serendipity found in the hybrid workplace and intentionally create strategies for purposefully influencing and establishing the right conditions for creating opportunities for serendipitous career growth and professional development for existing

and aspiring female leaders. Inspiring the creation of serendipitous opportunities for career advancement for females holding positions at all levels, from the initial entry-level to mid-level to senior leadership and executive-level positions in companies that embrace a hybrid workplace model. One approach to influencing the creation of serendipitous opportunities in a hybrid workplace involves the following activities: (a) niche employee resource groups for female leaders, (b) internal and external networking events, (c) social events, (d) company-wide competitions, (e) skill-sharing events, (f) in-person conferences, (g) cross-departmental events, (h) stretch goal projects and initiatives, and (i) town halls. Creating a collaborative online and physical space open to all employees that encourages interaction and idea exchange can also help create serendipitous opportunities and provide female leaders with the resources necessary to become members of critical professional and industry organizations that offer opportunities for networking and development.

Recommendation 5 is to implement a formal mentorship and sponsorship program for female leaders navigating career growth in a hybrid workplace model. Establishment of a mentorship and sponsorship program that matches female leaders with mentors within the organization and externally with industry experts worldwide, particularly for those companies that cannot meet all the needs for mentorship internally. There is a need for a program that allows for mentorship connections that are formal in nature and a program that creates mentorship moment opportunities that are less formal and require a low level of commitment to ongoing connections for those mentors who are too busy to commit to ongoing meetings with mentees.

Recommendation 6 is to embrace technology to support team unity, collaboration, and productivity. Utilize and continue to improve upon technologies used and how technology is used to support working productively and collaboratively. Study participants also discovered new approaches for leveraging technology related to improving knowledge-sharing across the organization and utilizing existing technological tools to help female leaders generate more robust performance and support career growth ambitions. Female leaders are encouraged to take the opportunity to innovate and search for ways technology can help female leaders better navigate career growth and overall performance in a hybrid workplace model.

Recommendation 7 is to conduct internal research to monitor the impact transitioning to a hybrid workplace model has on female leaders and gender equality. Dedicated time and resources to understanding how female leaders and all employees within the organization are doing during times of change and uncertainty, such as the transition to a hybrid workplace model. The transition to a new normal is continuing to evolve, hence the need for companies to commit to conducting internal research in the form of employee engagement surveys focusing on the identification of potential barriers and opportunities female leaders encounter when leading in a hybrid workplace model. As well as leveraging the internal research to create solutions to help female leaders successfully navigate their career journey, strengthening the pipeline of female leaders.

Recommendation 8 is to prioritize mental health and well-being support and initiatives. There is a need to allocate resources necessary to support female leaders with the prevention of mental health issues, along with support dealing with existing mental

health and well-being concerns and taking steps necessary to normalize speaking openly about mental health and creating a safe environment and supportive workplace environment for female leaders and all employees across the organization.

Future practice recommendations 9–14 relate to RQ2. Recommendation 9 is to leverage benefits associated with adopting a Situational Leadership® style to navigate new barriers female leaders experience leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model. When navigating new barriers female leaders experience when transitioning to leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model, leaders may have the ability, given the situation, to leverage benefits associated with adopting a Situational Leadership® style when leading in a hybrid workplace model identified in RQ2 of this study namely leveraging Themes 17–23, as shown in Figure 10.

Recommendation 10 is to commit to permanently adopting a flexible operating structure. Publicly committing to adopting a hybrid workplace model that allows for the flexibility necessary to allow female leaders to prioritize work–life balance and positions the organization as competitive, adaptive, and agile, committed to creating the right environment where female leaders can thrive, along with being empathic of the increased demands motherhood places on female leaders and allowing for flexible work arrangements that meet the needs of female leaders and the organizational needs for results and performance. An opportunity exists to re-think and re-design the workplaces' future operating structure from a gender equality perspective while also considering the various stakeholders' needs, such as the organization's need for results, customer or consumer's needs, and the team's collective needs for collaboration.

Recommendation 11 is to prioritize obtaining employee buy-in and engagement during the transition to a new normal, hybrid workplace model. Allowing female leaders and all employees to have a say in how the hybrid workplace model of the future evolves, beginning with an internal employee experience study that looks at the employee experience from a holistic perspective concerning operating in a hybrid workplace model, conducting an assessment of the employee's experience throughout their career journey within the organization, from onboarding, daily operations, and career development and advancement to succession planning and retirement, while keeping in mind the perspective of female leaders and gender equality in the workplace. Paying particular attention to any potential generational difference in their perceived ideal operating structure that could potentially impact the female leader's pipeline related to the attraction and retention of aspiring and existing female leaders.

Recommendation 12 is to establish anchor days, encouraging in-office engagement. Embrace the concept of introducing anchor days where the entire team meets in the office to collaborate, connect in person, and build connections. Anchor days help to ensure that employees are not returning to an office only to feel isolated should other team members remain working remotely and only to find themselves in the office on Zoom meetings, which could act as a further deterrent to wanting to return to the office and creating opportunities for female leaders to collaborate and interact in person. Recommendation 13 is to commit to adopting the Situational Leadership® style. Commit to formally adopting the corporate-level Situational Leadership® style for female leaders leading a team of knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model and providing leaders

with training and support resources to enhance their ability to tailor the leadership approach to each employee's specific needs, strengths, and experiences, learning style, career goals and aspirations, and life circumstances.

Lastly, Recommendation 14 is to adopt personality trait testing. Given that a Situational Leadership® style requires personalizing the leadership style at an individualized approach to leadership based upon employee needs and readiness, it is beneficial for leaders to conduct personality trait tests and assessments to gain a greater understanding of how best to lead each employee, along with offering insights at a team level for how better cohesion and collaboration can take place among the team members themselves. Personality trait testing and assessments can also offer insights into how best to communicate among teams, particularly given the increased need for more robust communication channels when employees work in a hybrid workplace. Examples of popular personality trait tests and assessments include Myer-Briggs Type Indicator® and StrengthFinder®.

### **Implications**

This section explores implications for future practice, presenting how this study's findings can positively impact social change from three perspectives: individual, organizational, and societal. The gender gap in senior leadership positions has existed for centuries. Despite progress made over the years, female leaders face more professional and personal barriers they must navigate along their career journey that are often different from those of their male colleagues.

This study provides new insights into the lived experiences of female leaders working for organizations with offices in Toronto, Canada, who have transitioned from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment to a hybrid workplace model, adopting a Situational Leadership® style. This study generated a code framework consisting of 52 codes and 23 themes, with 14 themes associated with the emergence of new insights into barriers and opportunities female leaders faced leading in a hybrid workplace model and nine themes associated with benefits female leaders' experiences associated with leading in a hybrid model by adopting a Situational Leadership® style discussed in detail in Chapter 4. This study's findings revealed the potential to positively impact social change at the individual, organizational, societal, and policy levels. Study findings also have the potential to contribute to the body of knowledge on barriers and opportunities females must navigate in their career journey and the benefits of applying the Situational Leadership® style when operating in a hybrid workplace model; these findings are discussed in the following section.

### **Individual Level of Social Change**

Analyzing the individual perspective, the 18 study participants transparently shared their personal lived experiences leading in a hybrid workplace model at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, during, and at present at a time when social distancing rules and regulations have significantly decreased or have been removed altogether. Many of the experiences shared stories of struggle and uncertainty, balanced with a sense of hopefulness and optimism that the new hybrid workplace model presents an opportunity to re-think the workplace and make changes that can, at an individual

level, present new career opportunities combined with a prioritization of work–life balance and mental health, along with more robust and more personal connections formed in the workplace, creating in a sense a more humanized workplace environment. The potential for social change at an individual level became evident after conducting a thematic analysis involving data collection and familiarization, creation of initial codes, code framework, creation of initial themes, theme refining, theme defining and naming, creation of thematic maps, and answering both RQs.

The thematic maps (as shown in Figures 8–10) created while conducting the thematic data analysis also illustrated an interconnection between the opportunities discovered in RQ1 and benefits associated with adopting a Situational Leadership® style found in RQ2 have the potential to help female leaders at an individual leadership level navigate the barriers that emerged in RQ1. This study generated new knowledge from RQ1 and RQ2 that offers valuable insights and recommendations for individual female leaders seeking to grow and advance their careers in hybrid workplace models, the future of work for many knowledge workers. The new knowledge and valuable recommendations for individual female leaders from RQ1 include a deep understanding and description of new barriers and opportunities (Themes 3–16) female leaders experienced when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a purely remote workplace during COVID-19 to a permanent hybrid workplace.

From a social change perspective, the study findings from RQ1 can help female leaders increase their awareness of barriers they may face, making them better capable of successfully navigating leadership and career-related obstacles. Findings from RQ1 can

also help female leaders identify and learn how to leverage potential opportunities in response to barriers or to create new career growth and advancement opportunities through self-advocacy. The new knowledge and valuable recommendations for individual female leaders that emerged from RQ2 include a deep understanding and description of benefits experienced by female leaders related to adopting a Situational Leadership® style (Themes 1–2, and Themes 17–23) experienced when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a purely remote workplace during COVID-19 to a permanent hybrid workplace model. From a social change perspective, the study findings from RQ2 can provide female leaders with insights into how to lead authentically while adapting their leadership style, successfully creating unified teams, thriving as hybrid leaders, and paving the way to prioritizing gender equality in leadership positions in the new normal, the hybrid workplace model.

This advanced knowledge for female leaders on how to thrive in a hybrid workplace model could have a positive social change impact at an individual level, with female leaders being better prepared to lead and advance their careers in this new flexible operating model. Findings from this study also uncovered that younger females just entering the workplace or in middle management are more affected by the hybrid workplace model, which results in a decrease in serendipitous career growth opportunities. Therefore, having advanced awareness of this potential barrier could help leaders take intentional action to ensure support programs or initiatives are in place to support the younger generation of female leaders better while also offering the younger generation awareness of this potential disadvantage so that they are empowered to self-

advocate for themselves and take actions to overcome or counterbalance this potential barrier to them successfully navigating their career growth and advancement.

Findings from this study may positively contribute to female leaders in practice. I observed several participants recall their experiences of leveraging feminine leadership intuition to identify serendipitous growth opportunities, which is highly effective when leading a team in a hybrid workplace model. This knowledge may help empower female leaders to embrace, further develop and apply their traits with other soft skills that also align and support adopting a Situational Leadership® style. This new knowledge has the potential to help female leaders be successful as hybrid leaders, advance their careers, and share these insights with the next generation of aspiring female leaders.

Given the insufficient academic-level literature and research on the topic of the hybrid workplace model (Jackowska & Luring, 2021) or the ideal leadership style to adopt (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021), particularly from the perspective of female leaders, this research contributes to the body of knowledge from a theoretical perspective in the field of leadership and management, along with the field of study pertaining the gender equality in the workplace. The study finding may also contribute to the body of knowledge on e-leadership theory, given the discovery that although none of the participants refer to e-leadership theory specifically by its name, study participants did acknowledge components of this style as being important when leading in a hybrid workplace model namely the importance of being able to effectively use technology to communicate effectively, engage, and collaborate with teams and other key stakeholders;

and being able to lead in an environment that requires a high level of adaptability and flexibility.

### **Organizational Level of Social Change**

Considering the organizational perspective, findings from this study may offer new insights into how to better support gender equality in the workplace at every level of the career journey. New insights into the barriers and opportunities female leaders experience in a hybrid workplace model may prove valuable when designing support programs for supporters of gender equality and could offer new knowledge that could help with the evolution of how the organization structures its flexible hybrid workplace model. The findings related to the benefits of situational leadership style in a hybrid model may provide new knowledge that could potentially influence an organization's decisions to offer formal leadership training and resources to those leaders transitioning to or evolving their leadership style, adapting the style to reflect the unique needs of leading a team in a hybrid workplace model from a female leadership perspective. Knowledge generated from this study may offer a new perspective on how best to support female leaders' career growth in a hybrid workplace model, positively impacting the organization's pipeline of female leaders, such as prioritizing mentorship programs and creating an ecosystem of support.

Findings from this study also highlight the importance of organizations providing an in-person space that allows for collaboration and creating serendipitous growth opportunities that emerge from collaborating in person with team members and beyond at a cross-functional and organizational level. From a social change perspective, better

supporting female leaders helps raise the brand profile of the organization, helping to place the organization in a competitive position for attracting and retaining top talent. Lastly, having a solid leadership team capable of effectively leading in a hybrid workplace model will have a positive influence on the overall performance and productivity of the organization.

### **Societal and Policy Level of Social Change**

Discoveries from this study may contribute to positive social change at both a societal and policy level. Beginning with the societal level findings from this study may positively contribute to knowledge that could help organizational leaders to achieve ESG goals (Nicolò et al., 2021) goals by offering new insights into how they may be required to adjust existing gender equality strategies and initiatives to reflect better the barriers female leaders experience when in a hybrid workplace model, which could have a positive impact on the underrepresentation of female leaders in the workplace which has significant economic implications on society at large. This study may also have a positive effect on raising awareness of the importance of mental health in the workplace, given that all participants raised this as a critical concern and the importance of normalizing conversations around mental health and offering support to helping female leaders prioritize their well-being, which from a societal perspective has the benefit of potentially flowing down to children and other community members that females with a support network and resources are then able to give back and support others.

Now, examining at the policy level, many companies that have adopted a hybrid workplace model, and based on participant's firsthand knowledge, recognize that the

flexible operating structure is not in its final form and continues to evolve at a time when leaders are also learning to adapt to this new structure and only beginning to understand what policies should be in place. For example, according to Participant 1, the hybrid workplace model is not in its final state and continues to evolve, saying, “I would say we’re still evolving and we’re still learning what this hybrid office of the future is going to look like over the long term.” Participant 18 also supports the overwhelming belief of all study participants that the hybrid workplace model is not only evolving, but it is going to be unique to each organization, saying, “It wasn’t going to be one-size-fits-all, and then still now we’re still, tweaking things, depending on our teams.” According to many participants, their respective organizations have created policies that they acknowledged need to be fully embraced or strictly adopted (Participant 6). Policy formation related to the hybrid workplace model structure is also evolving; for example, one study participant said, “I think we swung the pendulum in one direction of flexibility, and then we tried to swing it a little bit back to try to create normalcy in our business. And we landed on a hybrid solution where our official policy is that we want staff to be in the office most of the week, and the majority to us means 3 or more days” (Participant 4).

Findings from this study may positively influence the future creation of policies for the hybrid workplace model that positively support females at all career stages, support the pipeline of aspiring and existing female leaders and positively contribute to gender equality in the workplace. At a policy level, this research can influence policies around supporting female leaders in the workplace from a mental health perspective. For example, many participants shared examples of informal norms that had been established

to promote mental health, such as not scheduling meetings over lunch hours or Friday afternoon, not messaging employees after hours, and intentionally checking in with one another regularly, including one example where the organization had a formal list of employees who were at a higher risk of feeling isolated or potentially struggling with something at a personal level and purposefully taking the time to check in with those employees in an authentic, empathetic, and caring way.

### **Methodological, Empirical, and Empirical Implications**

The data findings that emerged from this hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative study through a thematic data analysis provided a significant amount of data findings that have a deep level of understanding and description, able to add value by supporting and influencing positive social change concerning gender equality in the workplace with an emphasis on female leadership, supporting initiative aimed at closing the gender gap. Data emerged from the study through the appropriate mix of methodological, theoretical, and empirical implications. Looking first at the methodological approach by applying a hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative study and empirical data, new knowledge emerged that provided a high level of understanding directly from the exploration of female leaders' lived experiences, making the data of high value to female leaders who are both aspiring female leaders, female leaders seeking further growth and development, and organizations seeking a greater understanding of the opportunities and barriers (30 codes and 14 themes emerging from RQ1) and benefits for adopting a Situational Leadership® style (22 codes and nine themes emerging from RQ2)

female leaders experience leading in a hybrid workplace model to close the gender gap in the workplace.

The future practice recommendations that emerged from RQ1 and RQ2 have the potential to support positive social change concerning gender equality in the workplace and at an individual level by sharing knowledge that has the potential to support female leaders' career growth and development. The eight future practice recommendations from RQ1 include

- Leveraging new opportunities to navigate new barriers female leaders experience leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model.
- Prioritizing the use of soft skills training when leading in a hybrid workplace model, taking steps to increase the transparency of the pipeline of female leaders at every step of the career journey.
- Intentionally creating opportunities for serendipitous career growth opportunities for female leaders.
- Implementing a formal mentorship and sponsorship program for female leaders navigating career growth in a hybrid workplace model.
- Embracing technology to support team unity, collaboration, and productivity.
- Conducting internal research to monitor the impact transitioning to a hybrid workplace model has on female leaders and gender equality.
- Prioritizing mental health and well-being support and initiatives.

The six future practice recommendations that emerged from RQ2 have the potential to support positive social change concerning gender equality in the workplace

and at an individual level by sharing knowledge that has the potential to support female leaders' career growth and development. The recommendations include

- Leveraging benefits associated with adopting Situational Leadership® style to navigate new barriers female leaders experience leading knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model.
- Publicly committing to permanently adopting a flexible operating structure.
- Prioritizing the importance of obtaining employee buy-in and engagement during the transition to a new normal, hybrid workplace model.
- Establishing anchor days encourages in-office engagement.
- Committing to adopting the Situational Leadership® style.
- Adopting personality trait testing.

From a theoretical implication perspective, the use of a conceptual framework supported the emergence of study findings that support social change by including the following concepts and theories: e-leadership theory (Torre & Sarti, 2020); Situational Leadership® style (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020); the concept of gender equality in the workplace (Bastida et al., 2019), understanding of barriers and opportunities to gender equality and female leaders ability to advance and grow (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020), the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on female leaders (Alon et al., 2020); and the concept of a hybrid workplace model (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021). The findings from this study may offer new knowledge and insights to individuals and organizations on how to better support female leaders to successfully advance their careers at a time when a new normal is continuing to evolve with the adoption of a hybrid

workplace model, creating an opportunity to re-evaluate improve old systems and approaches to close the gender gap in the workplace, which has a positive social impact at a more significant societal level.

### **Conclusions**

Female leaders have struggled for generations to achieve equality in the workplace, particularly when advancing their careers to senior leadership positions, and have faced many barriers they must navigate along their career journey. This study focused on the lived experience of female leaders transitioning to leading in a hybrid workplace model, understanding the barriers and opportunities, and the benefits of embracing a Situational Leadership® style. According to the literature review conducted for this study, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a tipping point, contributing to a paradigm shift in the future of work with companies in the knowledge economy that are committing to permanently adopting a flexible hybrid workplace model. Given that the transition to a hybrid workplace model is a new phenomenon, little research offers insight into the potential barriers or opportunities female leaders will be required to navigate in this new normal. Study participants share lived experiences that speak to a connection between the barriers female leaders face in a hybrid workplace model and the potential for the new opportunities discovered in a flexible operating structure, together with the benefits of applying a Situational Leadership® style ability to help female leaders better navigate, overcome, or counterbalance the barriers to career growth and advancement.

Some of the most common and insightful findings generated from this study relate to a new barrier that has emerged, according to study participants, when operating in a

remote workplace. Now, the hybrid workplace model is associated with a decrease in serendipitous career growth opportunities, challenges building personal brand equity, struggles to balance work–life for working mothers, increased mental health struggles, and a leak in the pipeline of female leaders. Numerous recommendations were generated from this study focused on providing insights into how female leaders may be able to improve their ability to successfully navigate barriers to career growth while leading a team in a hybrid workplace model by committing to enhancing self-awareness, self-advocacy, and intuition; embracing soft skills and feminine leadership traits; leveraging benefits associated with applying a Situational Leadership® style, intentionally creating serendipitous opportunities; embrace authentic and inclusive leadership; and take purpose-driven actions.

This doctoral journey has made me have an even greater level of appreciation for the importance of the continuous creation of new knowledge, particularly on topics that need innovative approaches to social change; such is the case, I believe, for gender equality in the workplace given the exciting opportunity to influence change at a time when the workplace is undergoing a revolutionary change. This study has confirmed that the hybrid workplace model is the new normal for many companies operating in the knowledge economy and adding to this level of complexity of this once-in-a-generation paradigm shift, this flexible operating structure is still evolving. I am excited about the findings that emerged from this study and see this new knowledge as just being the first step in a longer journey of understanding the future of work from a female leadership and gender equality perspective.

I believe that workplace evolution presents an exciting opportunity for female leaders and companies to re-think and re-design the future workplace that prioritizes supporting female leaders' success. What is clear based on this study is that leading in the hybrid workplace model will require female leaders to prioritize leading with intention, intuition, and authenticity. The entire research process and dissertation experience have inspired me to want to continue creating new knowledge; this study is only the beginning of my journey toward becoming a researcher and author committed to sharing knowledge that will help female leaders thrive and workplaces achieve unity in hybrid workplace models.

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## Appendix A: Study Overview

### Female Leaders Transitioning to Leading Knowledge Workers in a Hybrid Workplace Model

#### **The Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of female leaders who lead knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model in Toronto, Canada, who have experienced the transition from leading in a purely remote workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, to transitioning to leading in a more permanent hybrid workplace model.

#### **The Problem the Study is Exploring:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the future of work. The problem is that female leaders' career growth and advancement may be at risk if they cannot identify and successfully navigate the potential new barriers and opportunities while also adapting their leadership style to meet the potential new needs of the hybrid workplace model.

#### **The Central Research Questions:**

**RQ 1:** What are female leaders' lived experiences with identifying new barriers and opportunities they must navigate when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada, to adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

**RQ 2:** What are the benefits of female leaders adopting a situational leadership style when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in the Toronto, Canada, while adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

#### **The Potential for Social Good:**

This research study may create new knowledge to help female leaders navigate potential new barriers and opportunities when transitioning from a traditional in-office operating environment to a permanent hybrid workplace model. This research may also positively contribute to the body of knowledge related to advancing gender equality.

#### **Researcher:**

**Jennifer Ladouceur, MBA**

Doctoral Student at Walden University, [email address redacted], [telephone number redacted]

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

**Study title:** Female Leaders Transiting to a New Hybrid Workplace Model, During COVID-19

**Interview Participant Code #:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time Started:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time Finished:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Opening Statement:**

Good morning/afternoon,

I would like to begin by sincerely thanking you for agreeing to be a participant in this interview and study. As you are aware the purpose of this interview is to gain insight into your professional experience as a female leader transitioning from leading a team in a face-to-face, in-office environment, to leading in a hybrid workplace model.

This interview should take approximately 45-minutes to one-hour of your time. I will be recording this interview using the Zoom audio to ensure that I accurately capture all your comments and valuable insights. I will also be taking notes during this interview. All responses will be confidential. I would like to also remind you that you are not required to talk about anything you do not feel comfortable sharing, and you can end this interview at any time.

After the interview, I will be examining your answers to practice data analysis, and some of your answers will be shared with my instructor and classmates. However, I will not identify you in my documents, and no one will be able to identify you with your answers.

You can choose to stop this interview at any time. I encourage you to answer each question as openly and honestly as you can, there is no right or wrong response I am seeking to understand your specific lived experience.

- Do you have any questions?
- Are you ready to begin?
- If yes... Great I will begin the recording now if that is okay?

Before asking the first question I would like to remind you of the primary research questions being explored in this study, which include:

**RQ1:** What are female leaders' lived experiences with identifying new barriers and opportunities they must navigate when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada, to adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

**RQ2:** What are the benefits of female leaders adopting a Situational Leadership® style when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada, while adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

### **Interview Questions:**

#### ***Introductory Questions***

1. Can you please tell me about your current leadership position?

#### *Probing questions:*

- 1a) How long have you held this position?
  - 1b) How many employees report to you?
  - 1c) What are your department's primary roles and responsibilities?
  - 1d) How important is achieving gender equality in your organization?
2. Tell me how your company reacted to the first mandatory lockdown at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### ***Transition from In-Office, to Fully Remote, to a Hybrid Workplace Model Questions***

3. Tell me about your experience as a female leader transitioning from leading in a traditional in-office workplace environment to a purely remote operating structure during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.
4. Tell me about your company's decision to permanently adopt a new hybrid workplace model.

*Probing questions:*

- 4a) How would you describe the structure of your organization's hybrid workplace model?
- 4b) How do you determine the percentage of time your employees work in-office and remotely from home or anywhere?
- 4c) Have you identified activities and functions best suited to conducting in-office verse working remotely?

***Barriers to Overcome and Navigate Questions***

- 5. As a female leader, tell me about the barriers you experienced transitioning to leading in a purely remote operating structure.
- 6. As a female leader, tell me about the barriers you experienced or are experiencing while adapting to leading in a new hybrid workplace model operating structure.

*Probing questions:*

- 6a) What strategies have you taken as a hybrid leader to overcome these barriers?
- 6b) What advice would you give female leaders navigating barriers associated with this transition to leading in a new hybrid workplace model?

***Opportunities to Leverage and Navigate Questions***

- 7. What new opportunities have you identified or leveraged as a leader leading a team in a new hybrid workplace model?

*Probing questions:*

- 7a) What strategies have you taken to maximize the opportunities associated with leading in a flexible hybrid workplace model?
- 7b) What advice would you give female leaders navigating opportunities associated with this transitioning to leading in a new hybrid workplace model?

***Leadership Style Questions***

8. Tell me about your leadership style before the COVID-19 pandemic when you lead followers while operating in a traditional structure.
9. Tell me about your leadership style during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown when you lead followers while operating in a predominately remote structure.
10. Tell me about your leadership style when you transitioned to leading followers in a new hybrid workplace operating structure.
11. What are the benefits of applying Situational Leadership® style to leading in a hybrid workplace model?
  - 11a) Do you adapt your leadership style to the specific needs of each of your followers in a hybrid workplace model? If so, how?
  - 11b) Can you give me an example?

***Concluding Questions – Future of Work***

12. Do you believe that the hybrid workplace will become the future of work for knowledge workers? Can you please explain why or why not?
13. Is there anything else you could share with me that would be valuable to this study?

***Snowball Recruitment Request for Referrals***

14. Would you be open to referring another female leader who has experienced transitioning from leading in a purely remote workplace during the pandemic and is now transitioning to leading in a hybrid workplace model?

**Closing Statement:**

I will provide you with a transcript of our interview for your review, allowing you to make any necessary corrections and add any additional information that you believe will be helpful to this study. Once again, it is essential to mention that everything we discussed today is confidential, and your identity will not be revealed. I will follow up within the next two days and provide you with a transcription of our interview for you to review for accuracy. Do you have any questions for me? Please feel free to let me know if, following this interview, you think of something else upon reflection that you believe is important for me to include in this study.

## Appendix C: Study Participant Communication Email Templates

**Participant Invitation Email Template:**

Hello [*potential study participant*],

I hope that you are having a wonderful day.

My name is Jennifer Ladouceur, and I am a Ph.D. Candidate studying to complete my doctoral studies at Walden University in the United States. The study I am conducting is called “Female Leaders Transitioning to Leading Knowledge Workers in a Hybrid Workplace Model”. I am studying the lived experience of female leaders who have experienced the transition from leading in a purely remote workplace at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to transitioning to leading in a new hybrid workplace model. Please find attached to this e-mail a one-page description of the study’s research problem, purpose, and questions.

I invite you to participate in my study, which would involve an interview online with Zoom. The interview will take place using Zoom video conference, and the whole process should take no more than 45-minutes to one-hour of your time. I recommend that you participate in our one-on-one interview in a private area so that you can feel comfortable to be open.

Should you agree to participate, I will e-mail you a consent form for you to complete along with the list of interview questions that I will be asking during the interview and a link to Calendly an online scheduling tool where you will be able to schedule an interview that best suits your schedule. The study interviews will occur from [*month*] to [*month*], 2023.

Your support with this study is greatly appreciated as the purpose of the study is to create new knowledge that will potentially benefit female leaders as they navigate the hybrid workplace model and help organizations work towards gender equality while adopting flexible operating structures.

You can contact me by phone [redacted], or by email [redacted] if you have any questions and to let me know if you would like to participate.

Kind Regards, Jennifer  
**Jennifer Ladouceur, MBA**  
Doctoral Student at Walden University  
[email address redacted]  
[telephone number redacted]

**Participant Confirmation and Interview Scheduling Email Template (PreInterview)**

Hello [*potential study participant*],

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in my study “Female Leaders Transitioning to Leading Knowledge Workers in a Hybrid Workplace Model.”

The study interviews will occur from [*month*] to [*month*], 2023. Please click the following link to the Calendarly online scheduling tool to select an interview day and time that works best for your schedule [*Calendarly online hyperlink*]; all interviews will take place using Zoom. Please also feel free to reschedule or cancel our interview at any time.

I have also attached the consent form for you to review and sign before the interview. Should you have any questions or concerns about the consent form, please contact me by phone at [redacted] or by e-mail at [redacted] to discuss this consent form in further detail and ensure you feel comfortable with moving forward and participating in this study.

Kind Regards, Jennifer

**Jennifer Ladouceur, MBA**  
Doctoral Student at Walden University  
[email address redacted]  
[telephone number redacted]

**Participant Thank You and Transcript Review Email Template (Post interview)**

Hello [*potential study participant*],

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in my study “Female Leaders Transitioning to Leading Knowledge Workers in a Hybrid Workplace Model.” Your support is greatly appreciated.

Please find attached a copy of the interview transcription for your review. I encourage you to review this transcript to ensure that your answers to the research questions accurately capture your intended responses to each question, and please feel free to add additional information or make any potential corrections. Should you not have any questions, corrections, or additions please let me know that you are comfortable with this transcript. My goal is to ensure that this transcript accurately represents your lived experience.

I will be conducting data analysis, which includes the in-depth review of all interview transcripts from [*month*] to [*month*], 2023, and therefore would greatly appreciate your feedback, if possible, prior to [*month, date*], 2023.

You can contact me by phone [redacted], or by email [redacted] if you have any questions.

Kind Regards, Jennifer

**Jennifer Ladouceur, MBA**  
Doctoral Student at Walden University  
[email address redacted]  
[telephone number redacted]

Appendix D: Participant Recruitment Advertisement Copy

**Post Title: Volunteers Needed for a Ph.D. Dissertation Study on the Female Leaders Transitioning to Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model**

**Are you a female leader working who has transitioned to leading a team in a Hybrid Workplace Model willing to participate in an interview?**

**Study purpose:**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of female leaders who lead knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model in Toronto, Canada, who have experienced the transition from leading in a purely remote workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, to transitioning to leading in a more permanent hybrid workplace model.

**Are you eligible to participate?**

I am seeking study participants who are:

- Female leaders in mid-level or senior-level management
- Experienced leading a team during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Working in a company that has permanently adopted a hybrid workplace model that has an office in Toronto, Ontario
- Leading a minimum of five employees
- Have some knowledge or experience with e-leadership or situational leadership style

If you're unsure you meet the requirements, please contact me directly.

**Location**

- All interviews will be 45 minutes to one-hour and conducted remotely through Zoom.

**Are you interested in being a participant?**

Please contact me, **Jennifer Ladouceur**, directly at email [redacted] or by phone at [redacted] for the next steps and to receive a one-page study overview.

Figure D1

*Participant Recruitment Advertisement*

**Volunteers Needed for a Ph.D. Dissertation Study  
on Female Leaders Transitioning to Leading in a  
Hybrid Workplace Model**

Are you a female leader working who has transitioned to leading a team in a  
Hybrid Workplace Model willing to participate in an interview?

<p><b>Study purpose:</b></p> <p>The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of <b>female leaders who lead knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model in Toronto, Canada</b>, who have experienced the transition from leading in a purely remote workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, to transitioning to leading in a more permanent hybrid workplace model.</p> <p><b>Location:</b></p> <p>All interviews will be 45-minutes to one-hour and conducted remotely through Zoom</p>	<p><b>Are you eligible to participate?</b></p> <p><b>I am seeking study participants who are:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female leaders in mid-level or senior-level management</li> <li>• Experienced leading a team during the COVID-19 pandemic</li> <li>• Working in a company that has permanently adopted a hybrid workplace model that has an office in Toronto, Ontario</li> <li>• Leading a minimum of five employees</li> <li>• Have some knowledge or experience with e-leadership or situational leadership style</li> </ul> <p><b>If you're unsure you meet the requirements, please contact me directly.</b></p>
--	--

## Appendix E: Participant Recruitment Website

Figure E1

*Participant Recruitment Website: Home Page Introduction*

The screenshot shows a website for a Ph.D. Dissertation Research Study. At the top, the title "Ph.D. Dissertation Research Study" is centered in a box. Below it are navigation links for "HOME" and "CONTACT". The main visual is a woman standing on a path leading to a maze over a cityscape. To the right, a dark brown box contains the text "Seeking Participants for a Ph.D. Dissertation Study" and a "CONTACT US" button. Below this is a large dark brown banner with the title "Female Leaders Transitioning to Leading in a Hybrid Workplace". Underneath, a light pink box describes the study's purpose, and a photo of a woman in a business suit is on the right.

Ph.D. Dissertation  
Research Study

[HOME](#) [CONTACT](#)

Seeking  
Participants  
for a Ph.D.  
Dissertation  
Study

[CONTACT US](#)

Female Leaders  
Transitioning to  
Leading in a Hybrid  
Workplace

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of **female leaders who lead knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model in Toronto, Canada**, who have experienced the transition from leading in a purely remote workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, to transitioning to leading in a more permanent hybrid workplace model.

## Figure E2

### *Participant Recruitment Website: Meet the Researcher & Are You Eligible to Participate?*

#### MEET THE RESEARCHER



Thank you for taking the time to learn more about my study

My name is **Jennifer Ladouceur**, and I am a Ph.D. Candidate studying to complete my doctoral studies at **Walden University** in the United States.

The study I am conducting is called "Female Leaders Transitioning to Leading Knowledge Workers in a Hybrid Workplace Model".

I am studying the lived experience of female leaders who have experienced the transition from leading in a purely remote workplace at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to transitioning to leading in a new hybrid workplace model.

All interviews will be conducted using Zoom and will only take 45-minutes to one hour of your time.

Your support with this study is greatly appreciated as the purpose of the study is to create new knowledge that will potentially benefit female leaders as they navigate the hybrid workplace model and help organizations work towards gender equality while adopting flexible operating structures.

#### ARE YOU ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

##### Additional Information

I am seeking study participants who are:

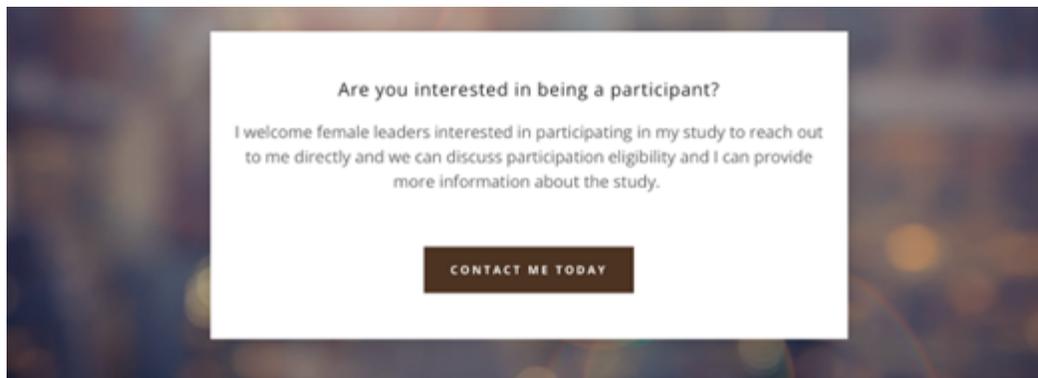
- Female leaders in mid-level or senior-level management
- Experienced leading a team during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Working in a company that has permanently adopted a hybrid workplace model that has an office in Toronto, Ontario
- Leading a minimum of five employees
- Have some knowledge or experience with e-leadership and situational leadership style

**If you're unsure you meet the requirements, please contact me directly.**



Figure E3

*Participant Recruitment Website: Participant Recruitment Advertisement*



Download PDF ▶

**Volunteers Needed for a Ph.D. Dissertation Study  
on Female Leaders Transitioning to Leading in a  
Hybrid Workplace Model**

Are you a female leader working who has transitioned to leading a team in a  
Hybrid Workplace Model willing to participate in an interview?

<p><b>Study purpose:</b></p> <p>The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of <b>female leaders who lead knowledge workers in a hybrid workplace model in Toronto, Canada</b>, who have experienced the transition from leading in a purely remote workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, to transitioning to leading in a more permanent hybrid workplace model.</p> <p><b>Location:</b></p> <p>All interviews will be 45-minutes to one-hour and conducted remotely through Zoom</p>	<p><b>Are you eligible to participate?</b></p> <p>I am seeking study participants who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female leaders in mid-level or senior-level management</li> <li>• Experienced leading a team during the COVID-19 pandemic</li> <li>• Working in a company that has permanently adopted a hybrid workplace model that has an office in Toronto, Ontario</li> <li>• Leading a minimum of five employees</li> <li>• Have some knowledge or experience with e-leadership and situational leadership style</li> </ul> <p><b>If you're unsure you meet the requirements, please contact me directly.</b></p>
--	--

**Are you interested in being a participant?**



**Figure E4***Participant Recruitment Website: A Study with a Social Good Purpose*

## A STUDY WITH A SOCIAL GOOD PURPOSE



From a positive social change perspective, this research study may create new knowledge to help female leaders navigate potential new barriers and opportunities when transitioning from a traditional in-office operating environment to a new permanent hybrid workplace model.

This research may positively contribute to the body of knowledge related to advancing gender equality. The research findings may provide female leaders with new insight that could help them potentially better navigate their career growth and could potentially offer new knowledge that may help organizations achieve Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) goals (Nicolò et al., 2021) while transitioning to a hybrid workplace model.

This study may also positively contribute to the body of knowledge related to the gender equality in the workplace, e-leadership theory, situational leadership style, and the hybrid workplace model specific to companies in the knowledge economy in Toronto. Focusing on conducting a study that will have a positive social change impact is one of the critical priorities of this study.

## SOCIAL



COPYRIGHT © 2023 PH.D. DISSERTATION RESEARCH STUDY - ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Contact

**Figure E5***Participant Recruitment Website: Contact Page*

http://thehybridworkplace.ca [Change](#)

Ph.D. Dissertation Research Study

[HOME](#) [CONTACT](#)

Are you interested in being a participant?

I welcome female leaders interested in participating in my study to reach out to me directly and we can discuss participation eligibility and I can provide more information about the study.

[CONTACT ME TODAY](#)

## CONTACT

Have a question about the study please feel free to contact me!

Name

Email\*

Phone

Message

Other notes

[SEND](#)

This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google Privacy Policy and Terms of Service apply.

## Appendix F: Interview Questions

Each study participant was asked 13 research questions, semi-structured research questions to answer the two research questions, which are listed below, presenting the interview questions and their associated alignment to RQ1 and RQ2, which include the following:

**RQ1:** What are female leaders' lived experiences with identifying new barriers and opportunities they must navigate when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada, to adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

**RQ2:** What are the benefits of female leaders adopting a Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> style when transitioning from leading knowledge workers in a traditional in-office environment in Toronto, Canada, while adapting to a hybrid workplace model?

Interview Questions	Related Research Questions
<p><b>Introductory Questions:</b></p> <p>1. Can you please tell me about your current leadership position?</p> <p><i>Probing questions:</i></p> <p>1a) How long have you held this position?</p> <p>1b) How many employees report to you?</p> <p>1c) What are your department's primary roles and responsibilities?</p> <p>1d) How important is achieving gender equality in your organization?</p> <p>2. Tell me how your company reacted to the first mandatory lockdown at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	<p>RQ1 and RQ2</p> <p>RQ1 and RQ2</p>

**Transition to a Hybrid Workplace Model Questions:**

- |    |  |             |
|----|--|-------------|
| 3. | Tell me about your experience as a female leader transitioning from leading in a traditional in-office workplace environment to a purely remote operating structure during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. | RQ1 and RQ2 |
| 4. | Tell me about your company's decision to permanently adopt a new hybrid workplace model.   | RQ1 and RQ2 |

*Probing questions:*

- |     |   |             |
|-----|---|-------------|
| 4a) | How would you describe the structure of your organization's hybrid workplace model?                           | RQ1 and RQ2 |
| 4b) | How do you determine the percentage of time your employees work in-office and remotely from home or anywhere? | RQ1 and RQ2 |
| 4c) | Have you identified activities and functions best suited to conducting in-office verse working remotely?      | RQ1 and RQ2 |

**Barriers to Overcome and Navigate Questions:**

- |    |   |     |
|----|---|-----|
| 5. | As a female leader, tell me about the barriers you experienced transitioning to leading in a purely remote operating structure.                                   | RQ1 |
| 6. | As a female leader, tell me about the barriers you experienced or are experiencing while adapting to leading in a new hybrid workplace model operating structure. | RQ1 |

*Probing questions:*

- |     |   |     |
|-----|---|-----|
| 6a) | What strategies have you taken as a hybrid leader to overcome these barriers?   | RQ1 |
| 6b) | What advice would you give female leaders navigating barriers associated with this transition to leading in a new hybrid workplace model? | RQ1 |

**Opportunities to Leverage and Navigate Questions:**

- |    |   |     |
|----|---|-----|
| 7. | What new opportunities have you identified or leveraged as a leader leading a team in a new hybrid workplace model? | RQ1 |
|----|---|-----|

*Probing questions:*

- |     |  |     |
|-----|--|-----|
| 7a) | What strategies have you taken to maximize the opportunities associated with leading in a flexible hybrid workplace model?                   | RQ1 |
| 7b) | What advice would you give female leaders navigating opportunities associated with transitioning to leading in a new hybrid workplace model? | RQ1 |

**Situational Leadership® Style Questions:**

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| 8. Tell me about your leadership style before the COVID-19 pandemic when you lead followers while operating in a traditional structure.                   | RQ2 |
| 9. Tell me about your leadership style during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown when you lead followers while operating in a predominately remote structure. | RQ2 |
| 10. Tell me about your leadership style when you transitioned to leading followers in a new hybrid workplace operating structure.                         | RQ2 |
| 11. What are the benefits of applying Situational Leadership® style to leading in a hybrid workplace model?   | RQ2 |
| 11a) Do you adapt your leadership style to the specific needs of each of your followers in a hybrid workplace model? If so, how?                          | RQ2 |
| 11b) Can you give me an example?  | RQ2 |

**Concluding Questions:**

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| 12. Do you believe that the hybrid workplace will become the future of work for knowledge workers? Can you please explain why or why not? | RQ1 and RQ2 |
| 13. Is there anything else you could share with me that would be valuable to this study?  | RQ1 and RQ2 |
-

## Appendix G: Initial Codes for Research Questions 1 and 2

The total number of initial codes created during phase two of the thematic data analysis involving the creation of initial codes is a total of 147 codes. Table G2 presents the 75 codes associated with RQ1, and Table G3 presents the 72 codes associated with RQ2.

**Table G1**

### *Initial Codes for Research Question 1*

RQ1 Related Initial Codes	
Advancing gender equality, a strategic priority	Lack of trust and employee visibility leading to micromanaging
Ability to leverage flexible work to improve work-life balance	Leading authentically is important in hybrid
Absence of random collisions	Leveraging intuition necessary for identifying personal brand opportunities
Adaptation to hybrid is possible due to technological infrastructure and support	Limited synergies and serendipitous opportunities
Attract and support top female talent	Mentors and support networks are more accessible in hybrid, with no geographical boundaries
Attraction, retention, and promotion of female leaders	Need to change performance measurement to increase trust in distributed teams
Behaviors that improve career growth in hybrid	Need to take control of your own career
Being top of mind takes intentional effort	New employees not connected to pre-COVID-19 culture
Burnout and mental health negatively impacting the pipeline of female leaders, particularly in COVID-19	Non-paid domestic duties and childcare are largely female responsibilities
Career growth opportunities related to increased flexibility	Opportunity to hire top talent from anywhere

Challenges of teams bonding remotely	Opportunity to set new career goals and aspirations
Challenges to inclusion and belonging in hybrid	Opportunity to understand individual needs of employees and teams in hybrid
Change and uncertainty due to COVID-19 and transition to hybrid	Prioritization of self-care normalized
Common language around mental health	Purposeful action required for gender equality
Competitive positioning – female leaders seek flexible operating structure; lack of flexible structure becomes a disadvantage	Re-evaluate life to understand self-care needs
Decrease in personal brand opportunities negatively impact career growth	Reduced visibility into employee’s daily activities
Decrease in spontaneous connections	Reduction in cross-functional exposure
Decrease in spontaneous knowledge sharing	Resilience and adaptability resources
Early adopters to hybrid workplace model in pre-existing distributed teams	Resistance to change
Female leaders exit the workforce	Self-awareness is required when leading in hybrid
Female leaders taking early retirement	Self-efficacy required in transition to hybrid
Female leaders taking leave of absence	Self-reflection important when leading authentically
Flexibility operating structure offers benefits for female leaders	Sense of purpose re-evaluation
Formation of clicks and silos	Shared understanding, sense of community, and common goals among hybrid teams is possible
Generational differences	Social cohesion challenges
Having to make the decision between children and career growth	Some men are starting to take on more childcare responsibilities, but a significant gap remains, especially during the COVID-19 – parenthood penalty
Hybrid impacts corporate culture	Stress, anxiety, burnout, isolation, loneliness, and social phobia increasing during COVID-19 and when transitioning to hybrid
Hybrid impacts entry level and aspiring female leaders career journey	Struggle mothers face balancing work and life

Hybrid model in its infancy	Struggles advancing career in entry and mid-level, such as aspiring female leaders
Importance of intentionally seeking mentors and growing network in hybrid	Struggles with communication, contextual understanding contributing to challenges with trust in hybrid
Importance of re-designing the operating structure to nurture team cohesion	Struggles with personal brand awareness in remote environment
Importance of self-awareness and personal growth	Team dynamics struggles
Importance of soft skill in hybrid such as leading with empathy, resilience, adaptability, intuition, emotional intelligence, caring, encouragement, and inspiration	The Great Resignation
Increase in multi-tasking, decreased engagement	Traditional gender roles still exist
Increased access to mental health support	Trust Issues when hired post-COVID-19
Intentional personal brand awareness	Uncertainty and change impacting mental health
Lack of barriers female leaders face around when to stop working in hybrid	Unlock career growth through mentorship
Lack of in-person energy or synergy	Workaholic & Zoom fatigue

---

**Table G2***Initial Codes for Research Question 2*

RQ2 Related Initial Codes	
A desire for increased job flexibility	Purpose-driven
Accessible as a leader	Purpose-driven leadership
Adaptable leadership style required for leading teams in hybrid	Regularly communications
Adapting leadership style to employees' evolving needs	Resilience
Adjusting leadership style during times of uncertainty	Resisting the desire to micromanage
Authenticity supporting a culture of trust	Revolutionizing the workplace
Co-creation of a hybrid workplace model	Role modeling
Connect with employee intuitively, understanding their needs	Self-awareness and intuition
Continuous learning is important in hybrid	Self-efficacy
Customize hybrid model to company and individual departments' needs	Self-management
Desire by knowledge workers for permanent flexibility	Sense of belonging
Dynamic and evolving operating structure	Sense of unity in uncertain and turbulent times
Early adopters exist but are also focused on evolving the operating structure	Situational leader
Enhanced performance and productivity	Situational leadership involves leading each employee based on their skills, capabilities, experiences, and aspirations
Flexible operating structure	Skill development and tailored support
Focus on understanding one another better professionally and personally	Softening of the formal hierarchical structure

Humanization of the workplace during change	Strong communication channels
Hybrid individualized model	Support employee's skills growth
Hybrid workplace model adds complexity to leadership	Support employees
Importance of self-awareness	Tailor leadership style
Importance of technical skills in hybrid	Team building in hybrid
Inclusivity and engagement	The hybrid workplace model is recognized as a paradigm shift
Informed decision-making supported by intuition	Time for self-reflection - Review of your purpose
Intentional knowledge sharing	Togetherness and belonging
Intentional tailoring of leadership style for each employee	Training and development
Micro-learning opportunities	Transformative evolution of how, where, and when people work
Modification of communication message and medium	Transition
Modifying and adjusting leadership style	Transparency
Navigating the new normal	Trust among hybrid team
Need for a culture of support, encouragement, and understanding	Trust between employee and leader
New normal, a permanent hybrid workplace model	Two-way communication channels
Nurturing employee's skills and capabilities	Understanding employees' strengths, weaknesses, and potential
Open door policy and meaningful conversations	Unity and togetherness
Optimal conditions must be intentionally created for team engagement and collaboration	Vulnerability and transparency
Personalize communication style and medium	Vulnerability supporting a culture of trust
Providing employees greater autonomy	Warmth and understanding

---

## Appendix H: Code Framework for Research Questions 1 and 2

A total of 52 critical codes emerged from the thematic data analysis as part of the code framework for both research questions. The code framework for RQ1 is presented in Table H1, and the code framework for RQ2 is presented in Table H2.

### Table H1

#### *Code Framework for Research Question 1*

RQ1 Code Framework	
Adaptation of performance and productivity measurements for hybrid	Mental health and well-being
Career journey obstacles	Mentorship and support networks
Culture of unity in hybrid	Obstacles and perceptions working mothers encounter
Collaboration and engagement obstacles	Out-of-sight, out-of-mind dilemma
Feminine leadership traits and soft skills	Parenthood penalty
Formation of exclusive sub-cultures and departmental silos	Personal brand equity obstacles
Gender inequality in the workplace	Prioritizing gender equality in hybrid
Generational differences	Purpose-driven self-reflection
Humanization of the hybrid workplace	Self-awareness and emotional intelligence
Intentional gender equality actions and strategies	Team cohesion and unity obstacles
Intentional creation of serendipitous growth opportunities	Technology empowering working from home
Knowledge sharing	Technology supporting collaboration and engagement
Leaks in the pipeline of female talent	Work-life balance by leveraging flexibility
Limited serendipitous career growth opportunities	Work-life obstacles
Mental health struggles	

**Table H2***Code Framework for Research Question 2*


---

RQ2 Code Framework	
Adaptable leadership approach	Hybrid offers the best of both worlds
Authentic and empathetic leadership	Hybrid workplace model and flexibility
Consistent and transparent communication	Individualized leadership approach
Continuous skills development	Knowledge workers
COVID-19 pandemic the impetus for hybrid	Leveraging technology for collaboration in hybrid
Embracing intuition and intentionality	Navigating change and uncertainty
Employee-centric understanding	Nurturing a culture of trust
Empowering employees	One-size-does-not-fit-all in hybrid models
Engagement and collaboration in distributed teams	Open door policy in hybrid
Evolution of the hybrid workplace models	Performance reviews in hybrid
Future of work is hybrid – New normal	Softening of formal hierarchical structures
Growth mindset and knowledge sharing	

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## Appendix I: Codes, Categories, and Themes for Research Questions 1 and 2

The following tables illustrate the findings from conducting a thematic analysis, including the codes, categories, and themes that emerged for RQ1, presented in Table I1, and RQ2, presented in Table I2.

**Table I1**

### *Codes, Categories, and Themes for Research Question 1*

RQ1 Codes	RQ1 Categories	RQ1 Themes
<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>Advancing gender equality, a strategic priority</p> <p>Attract and support top female talent</p> <p>Change and uncertainty due to COVID-19 and transition to hybrid</p> <p>Flexibility operating structure offers benefits for female leaders</p> <p>Gender inequality in the workplace</p> <p>Hybrid in its infancy</p> <p>Intentional gender equality actions and strategies</p> <p>Opportunity to hire top talent from anywhere</p> <p>Prioritizing gender equality in hybrid</p> <p>Purposeful action required for gender equality</p>	<p><b>Barriers – Hybrid Workplace Model Specific:</b></p> <p>Gender equality remains a strategic priority when transitioning to a hybrid workplace model and overcoming barriers to gender equality in the workplace.</p> <p>Given that the hybrid workplace model is in its infancy and many barriers exist that female leaders must navigate, advancing gender equality in the new flexible operating structure is critical to solving gender inequality in the workplace.</p> <p>Intentional and purposeful effort is required to overcome barriers associated with attracting and supporting top female talent in hybrid.</p>	<p><b>Theme 3:</b></p> <p>Advancing Gender Equality in Hybrid</p>

<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>Attraction, retention, and promotion of female leaders</p> <p>Burnout and mental health negatively impacting the pipeline of female leaders, particularly during COVID-19</p> <p>Competitive positioning – female leaders seek flexible operating structure; lack of flexible structure becomes a disadvantage</p> <p>Female leaders exit the workforce</p> <p>Female leaders taking early retirement</p> <p>Female leaders taking leave of absence</p> <p>Leaks in the pipeline of female talent</p> <p>The Great Resignation</p>	<p><b>Barriers:</b></p> <p>Barriers exist for female leaders seeking employment opportunities in flexible operating structures, which is negatively impacting the pipeline of female leaders.</p> <p>Many different factors cause leaks in the pipeline of female leaders (i.e., retention issues, early retirement, leave of absence).</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic has increased barriers for female leader retention and advancement to senior leadership positions.</p> <p>The leak in the pipeline of female leaders still exists and remains a significant barrier, negatively impacting the ability to attract, retain, and promote female leaders.</p>	<p><b>Theme 4:</b></p> <p>Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid</p>
<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>Having to make the decision between children and career growth</p> <p>Non-paid domestic duties and childcare are largely female responsibilities</p> <p>Obstacles and perceptions working mothers encounter</p> <p>Parenthood penalty</p> <p>Some men are starting to take on more childcare responsibilities, but a significant gap remains, especially during the COVID-19 – parenthood penalty</p> <p>Struggle mothers face balancing work and life</p> <p>Traditional gender roles still exist</p>	<p><b>Barriers:</b></p> <p>Balancing work-life is a struggle for many working mothers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Gender roles still exist creating barriers to career growth associated with female leaders being responsible for most non-paid domestic and childcare responsibilities.</p> <p>Working mothers continue to face obstacles and perceptions associated with traditional gender roles that can create barriers that limit career growth.</p>	<p><b>Theme 5:</b></p> <p>Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work-Life in Hybrid</p>

<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>Being top of mind takes intentional effort</p> <p>Decrease in personal brand opportunities negatively impact career growth</p> <p>Intentional personal brand awareness</p> <p>Leveraging intuition necessary for identifying personal brand opportunities</p> <p>Out-of-sight, out-of-mind dilemma</p> <p>Personal brand equity obstacles</p> <p>Reduction in cross-functional exposure</p> <p>Struggles with personal brand awareness in remote environment</p>	<p><b>Barriers:</b></p> <p>Reduction in spontaneous cross-functional interactions, reducing personal brand exposure opportunities when operating remotely.</p> <p>The hybrid workplace model limits the amount of in-person interaction and reduces opportunities for building or nurturing personal brand equity beyond female leaders' regular sphere of interactions.</p> <p>The remote working component of the hybrid workplace model is creating a barrier described as an out-of-sight, out-of-mind dilemma for many female leaders seeking to raise their personal brand equity.</p>	<p><b>Theme 6:</b></p> <p>Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid</p>
<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>Absence of random collisions</p> <p>Career journey obstacles</p> <p>Decrease in spontaneous knowledge sharing</p> <p>Decrease in spontaneous new connections</p> <p>Hybrid impacts entry level and aspiring female leaders career journey</p> <p>Increase in multi-tasking, decreased engagement</p> <p>Lack of in-person energy or synergy</p> <p>Limited serendipitous career growth opportunities</p> <p>Struggles advancing career in entry and mid-level, such as aspiring female leaders</p>	<p><b>Barriers:</b></p> <p>Barriers to career growth emerging in a hybrid workplace model, related to a decrease in access to natural synergies and growth opportunities.</p> <p>Decrease in spontaneous knowledge sharing creating obstacles for aspiring female leaders career growth in hybrid.</p> <p>Recognition that barriers female leaders face that increasing the need to be intentional in creating serendipitous pathways to career journey in hybrid.</p>	<p><b>Theme 7:</b></p> <p>Career Advancement Obstacles and Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Aspiring Female Leaders in Hybrid</p>

<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>Challenges of teams bonding remotely</p> <p>Challenges to inclusion and belonging in hybrid</p> <p>Formation of clicks and silos</p> <p>Formation of exclusive sub-culture and departmental silos</p> <p>Generational differences challenging team unity</p> <p>Hybrid impacts corporate culture</p> <p>New employees not connected to pre-COVID-19 culture</p> <p>Social cohesion challenges</p> <p>Team cohesion and unity obstacles</p> <p>Team dynamics struggles</p>	<p><b>Barriers:</b></p> <p>Barriers such as the formation of exclusive clicks, silos, and sub-cultures beginning to emerge during COVID-19 creating challenges to team dynamics and social cohesion leading to disunity in hybrid.</p> <p>Emergence of new obstacles to maintaining a strong corporate culture in a hybrid workplace model and sense of inclusion and belonging.</p> <p>Identification of barriers female leaders must face when transitioning to leading in a hybrid workplace model including generational differences contributing to disunity among teams operating in hybrid.</p>	<p><b>Theme 8:</b></p> <p>Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid</p>
<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>Lack of barriers female leaders face around when to stop working in hybrid</p> <p>Mental health struggles</p> <p>Stress, anxiety, burnout, isolation, loneliness, and social phobia increasing during COVID-19 and when transitioning to hybrid</p> <p>Uncertainty and change impacting mental health</p> <p>Work-life obstacles</p> <p>Workaholic &amp; Zoom fatigue</p>	<p><b>Barriers:</b></p> <p>Existence of work-life balance barriers contributing to mental health struggles experienced by many female leaders.</p> <p>Increase in mental health struggles related to uncertainty and change associated with the transition to hybrid.</p> <p>Increase of issues such as stress, anxiety, burnout, and feelings of isolation, loneliness, and social phobia associated with COVID-19 and during the transition and evolution of adopting a hybrid workplace model.</p>	<p><b>Theme 9:</b></p> <p>Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid</p>
<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>Adaptation of performance and productivity measurements for hybrid</p>	<p><b>Barriers:</b></p> <p>Barriers exist associated with establishing trust in a hybrid workplace model, which is essential to maintaining a high</p>	<p><b>Theme 10:</b></p> <p>Need for Female Leaders to Modify Their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid</p>

Collaboration and engagement obstacles	level of performance and productivity in distributed teams.
Lack of trust and employee visibility leading to micromanaging	Barriers exist related to establishing trust in a hybrid workplace model exist due to decreased visibility of employee performance.
Need to change performance measurement to increase trust in distributed teams	
Reduced visibility into employee's daily activities	Employees resistance to change requires a modified approach to building trust that meets the individual needs of each employee in a hybrid workplace model.
Resistance to change	
Struggles with communication, contextual understanding contributing to challenges with trust in hybrid	
Trust issues when hired post-COVID-19	

**Initial and Framework Codes:**

Ability to leverage flexible work to improve work-life balance

Common language around mental health

Mental health and well-being

Prioritization of self-care normalized

Re-evaluate life to understand self-care needs

Resilience and adaptability resources

Work-life balance by leveraging flexibility

**Opportunities:**

Creation of common language around mental health and well-being recognized as an opportunity for improving mental health.

Increased resources available presents an opportunity for enhancing mental health support with companies' recognizing the importance of helping employees be resilience and adaptable.

Normalization of prioritizing self-care including mental health and well-being an opportunity to help female leaders achieve a better work-life balance.

Opportunity to establish a better connection between prioritizing mental health and establishing a better work-life balance possible in a hybrid workplace model.

**Theme 11:**

Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work-Life Balance in Hybrid

<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>Behaviors that improve career growth in hybrid</p> <p>Career growth opportunities related to increased flexibility</p> <p>Intentional creation of serendipitous growth opportunities</p> <p>Limited synergies and serendipitous opportunities</p> <p>Need to take control of your own career</p> <p>Opportunity to set new career goals and aspirations</p> <p>Purpose-driven self-reflection</p> <p>Self-efficacy required in transition to hybrid</p> <p>Sense of purpose re-evaluation – professionally and personally</p>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <p>Opportunity to embrace the importance of self-efficacy and intentional creation of serendipitous opportunities in hybrid with potential to lead to purpose driven career growth for female leaders.</p> <p>Potential exists to create new career growth opportunities and identify new types of synergies in a flexible operating structure.</p> <p>Transition to hybrid workplace model has created an opportunity for female leaders to prioritize self-reflecting and re-evaluating their sense of purpose – professionally and personally.</p>	<p><b>Theme 12:</b></p> <p>Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid</p>
<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>Adaptation to hybrid is possible due to technological infrastructure and support</p> <p>Early adopters to hybrid workplace model in pre-existing distributed teams</p> <p>Technology empowering working from home</p> <p>Technology supporting collaboration and engagement</p>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <p>Opportunity to leverage technology to effectively lead distributed teams.</p> <p>Technology created an opportunity for flexible work, given the recognition that technology is the backbone that empowering flexible working options like the hybrid workplace model.</p> <p>Technology empowers female leaders in hybrid to collaborate and engage.</p>	<p><b>Theme 13:</b></p> <p>Technology Empowerment in Hybrid</p>
<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>Culture of unity in hybrid</p> <p>Humanization of the hybrid workplace</p>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <p>Opportunity during the transition to a hybrid workplace model to intentionally create a flexible unified operating structure that</p>	<p><b>Theme 14:</b></p> <p>Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid</p>

Importance of intentionally and purposefully re-thinking and re-designing the operating structure to nurture team cohesion

Opportunity to understand individual needs of employees and teams in hybrid

Shared understanding, sense of community, and common goals among hybrid teams is possible

prioritizes establishing a cohesive team with shared culture, and shared understanding around achieving common goals.

The hybrid workplace model provides an opportunity to prioritize establishing a strong corporate culture focused on the individual needs of employees and humanization of the workplace further supporting unified teams.

**Initial and Framework Codes:**

Feminine leadership traits and soft skills

Importance of self-awareness and personal growth

Importance of soft skill in hybrid such as leading with empathy, resilience, adaptability, intuition, caring, encouragement, and inspiration

Leading authentically is important in hybrid

Self-awareness and emotional intelligence

Self-awareness is required when leading in hybrid

Self-reflection important when leading authentically

**Initial and Framework Codes:**

Importance of intentionally seeking mentors and growing network in hybrid

Knowledge sharing

Mentors and support networks are more accessible in hybrid, with no geographical boundaries

**Opportunities:**

Opportunity to embrace feminine leadership traits and soft skills when leading in hybrid.

Opportunity to lead authentically and prioritize increasing self-awareness, self-reflection, and personal growth when leading in a hybrid workplace model.

**Opportunities:**

Opportunity for mentorship to be more accessible to female leaders in hybrid, allowing for increased knowledge sharing.

Opportunity for female leaders to intentionally establish and grow connections to mentors and support networks in a hybrid workplace model with no geographical restrictions.

**Theme 15:**

Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid

**Theme 16:**

Increased Access to Mentors and Support Networks in Hybrid

Mentorship and support networks

Unlock career growth through  
mentorship

Opportunity for increased  
access to support networks in a  
hybrid workplace model.

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**Table I2***Codes, Categories, and Themes for Research Question 2*

RQ2 Codes	RQ2 Categories	RQ2 Themes
<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>A desire for increased job flexibility</p> <p>COVID-19 pandemic is the impetus for hybrid</p> <p>Desire by knowledge workers for permanent flexibility</p> <p>Flexible operating structure</p> <p>Future of work is hybrid – The new normal</p> <p>Hybrid offers the best of both worlds</p> <p>Knowledge workers</p> <p>Navigating the new normal</p> <p>New normal, a permanent hybrid workplace model</p> <p>Revolutionizing the workplace</p> <p>The hybrid workplace model is recognized as a paradigm shift</p>	<p><b>Benefits of Situational Leadership® Style – Hybrid Workplace Model Specific:</b></p> <p>COVID-19 has initiated a paradigm shift towards a new normal – a flexible operating structure female leaders find themselves navigating.</p> <p>For many knowledge workers, the future of work involves adopting a hybrid workplace model, offering the best of both worlds and creating a new normal for female leaders.</p> <p>Many knowledge workers refuse to return to the traditional operating structure and desire more flexibility.</p>	<p><b>Theme 1:</b></p> <p>The Future of Work is Hybrid for Many Knowledge Workers</p>
<p><b>Initial and Framework Codes:</b></p> <p>Co-creation of a hybrid workplace model</p> <p>Customize hybrid model to company and individual departments' needs</p> <p>Early adopters exist but are also focused on evolving the operating structure</p> <p>Evolution of the hybrid workplace models</p>	<p><b>Benefits of Situational Leadership® Style – Hybrid Workplace Model Specific:</b></p> <p>The flexible nature of the hybrid workplace model is dynamic and individualized, allowing each company and department to customize the flexible operating structure to meet their specific needs.</p> <p>The hybrid workplace model is emerging, transforming, and</p>	<p><b>Theme 2:</b></p> <p>Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model</p>

Hybrid individualized model evolving how, where, and when work is performed.

Hybrid workplace model and flexibility

One-size-does-not-fit-all in hybrid models

Transformative evolution of how, where, and when people work

**Initial and Framework Codes:**

Employee-centric understanding

Hybrid workplace model adds complexity to leadership

Individualized leadership approach

Intentional tailoring of leadership style for each employee

Personalize communication style and medium

Purpose-driven

Situational leader

Situational Leadership® involves leading each employee based on their skills, capabilities, experiences, and aspirations

Support employee's skills growth

Tailor leadership style

Vulnerability and transparency

Warmth and understanding

**Initial and Framework Codes:**

Adaptable leadership approach

Adapting leadership style to employees' evolving needs

Adjusting leadership style during times of uncertainty

**Benefits of Situational Leadership® Style:**

Situational Leadership® style focuses on taking an employee-centric approach to leading by taking time to understand each individual employee genuinely.

Situational Leadership® style involves adapting your leadership style to each individual employee within the context also of the emergence of complex and flexible operating structures such as the hybrid workplace model.

Situational Leadership® style places a high level of importance on understanding employees' individual strengths, challenges, experiences, skills, and aspirations.

**Theme 17:**

The Benefits of Taking an Individualized Leadership Approach Compatible with the Complex and Flexible Nature of the Hybrid Workplace Models

**Benefits of Situational Leadership® Style:**

Situational Leadership® style aligns with the importance of resilience, empathy, and role modeling during times of transition, such as the adoption of a hybrid workplace model.

**Theme 18:**

The Benefits of Being an Adaptable Leadership Approach During Times of Change and Uncertainty

Dynamic and evolving operating structure	Situational Leadership® style allows leaders in hybrid to modify and adjust their leadership style to meet the needs during change and uncertainty.
Humanization of the workplace during change	
Modifying and adjusting leadership style	Situational Leadership® style enables leaders to adapt leadership style during times of change based on the dynamic and evolving needs of employees.
Navigating change and uncertainty	
Resilience	
Role modeling	
Transition	

**Initial and Framework Codes:**

Authenticity supporting a culture of trust

Empowering employees

Nurturing a culture of trust

Performance reviews in hybrid

Providing employees greater autonomy

Resisting the desire to micromanage

Self-management

Togetherness and belonging

Transparency

Trust among hybrid team

Trust between employee and leader

Unity and togetherness

Vulnerability supporting a culture of trust

**Benefits of Situational Leadership® Style:**

Situational Leadership® style creates level of trust that helps to establish a strong culture of trust between employee and leader, and among hybrid teams.

Situational Leadership® style priorities leaders gaining in-depth understanding of employees contributing to the establishment and nurturing of trust, leading to providing employees greater autonomy, and resisting micromanaging.

Situational Leadership® style promotes a sense of vulnerability with leaders and employees being transparent and authentic as they get to know and understand one another.

**Theme 19:**

The Benefits of Empowering Employees and Cultivating Trust in a Hybrid Workplace Model

**Initial and Framework Codes:**

Accessible as a leader

Consistent and transparent communication

**Benefits of Situational Leadership® Style:**

Situational Leadership® style prioritizes understanding each employee hence recognizing the importance of being accessible

**Theme 20:**

The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model

Inclusivity and engagement	and having meaningful conversations with employees as a leader.
Modification of communication message and medium	
Open door policy and meaningful conversations	Situational Leadership® style promotes leaders modifying communications to ensure the message is received by all employees who each have individual communication preferences.
Open door policy in hybrid	
Regularly communications	
Strong communication channels	Situational Leadership® style supports that transparency and consistency of communication among all key stakeholders.
Support employees	
Two-way communication channels	

**Initial and Framework Codes:**

Adaptable leadership style required for leading teams in hybrid

Engagement and collaboration in distributed teams

Enhanced performance and productivity

Focus on understanding one another better professionally and personally

Leveraging technology for collaboration in hybrid

Optimal conditions must be intentionally created for team engagement and collaboration

Sense of belonging

Sense of unity in uncertain and turbulent times

Softening of formal hierarchical structures

Team building in hybrid

**Benefits of Situational Leadership® Style:**

Situational Leadership® style as a highly adaptable leadership style supports leading in a manner that creates a sense of belonging and unity during times of change and uncertainty.

Situational Leadership® style encourages and supports team engagement and collaboration by focusing on establishing understanding and support across teams that are in-person or remote, recognition of a softening of the hierarchical structure.

Situational Leadership® style recognized the importance of leveraging technology to support teams' collaboration, while ensuring to tailor leadership style to the needs of the hybrid workplace model.

**Theme 21:**

The Benefits of Team Engagement and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace Model

**Initial and Framework Codes:**

Continuous learning is important in hybrid

**Benefits of Situational Leadership® Style:**

Situational Leadership® style believes in leaders understanding

**Theme 22:**

The Benefits of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and Growth

Continuous skills development	employees' areas of growth and potential and helping to nurture employee's skills and capabilities.	Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model
Growth mindset and knowledge sharing		
Micro-learning opportunities	Situational Leadership® style encourages continuous learning, skill development, and sharing of knowledge.	
Nurturing employee's skills and capabilities		
Importance of technical skills in hybrid	Situational Leadership® style is a strong supporter of having a growth mindset.	
Intentional knowledge sharing		
Skill development and tailored support		
Training and development		
Understanding employees' strengths, weaknesses, and potential		

**Initial and Framework Codes:**

Authentic and empathetic leadership

Connect with employee intuitively, understanding their needs

Embracing intuition and intentionality

Importance of self-awareness

Informed decision-making supported by intuition

Need for a culture of support, encouragement, and understanding  
Purpose-driven leadership

Self-awareness and intuition

Self-efficacy

Time for self-reflection - Review of your purpose

**Benefits of Situational Leadership Style:**

The Situational Leadership® style encourages leaders to be purpose-driven leaders and lead authentically, beginning with raising their level of self-awareness.

Situational Leadership® style focuses on leveraging intuition when connecting with employees and intuitively adapting the leadership style based on individual needs. Situational Leadership® style requires leaders to intentionally take action that is purposeful particularly when it comes to creating a safe environment, intentionally creating a culture of support, encouragement, and understanding.

**Theme 23:**

The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model

## Appendix J: Categories and Themes for Research Questions 1 and 2

A total of 23 themes emerged from the thematic data analysis for RQ1 and RQ2.

The themes for RQ1 are presented in Table J1, and the themes for RQ2 are presented in Table J2.

**Table J1**

### *Categories and Themes for Research Question 1*

RQ1 Categories	RQ1 Themes
<p><b>Barriers – Hybrid Workplace Model Specific:</b></p> <p>Gender equality remains a strategic priority when transitioning to a hybrid workplace model and overcoming barriers to gender equality in the workplace.</p> <p>Given that the hybrid workplace model is in its infancy and many barriers exist that female leaders must navigate, advancing gender equality in the new flexible operating structure is critical to solving gender inequality in the workplace.</p> <p>Intentional and purposeful effort is required to overcome barriers associated with attracting and supporting top female talent in hybrid.</p>	<p><b>Theme 3:</b></p> <p>Advancing Gender Equality in Hybrid</p>
<p><b>Barriers:</b></p> <p>Barriers exist for female leaders seeking employment opportunities in flexible operating structures, which is negatively impacting the pipeline of female leaders.</p> <p>Many different factors cause leaks in the pipeline of female leaders (i.e., retention issues, early retirement, leave of absence).</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic has increased barriers for female leader retention and advancement to senior leadership positions.</p> <p>The leak in the pipeline of female leaders still exists and remains a significant barrier, negatively impacting the ability to attract, retain, and promote female leaders.</p>	<p><b>Theme 4:</b></p> <p>Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid</p>

**Barriers:**

Balancing work-life is a struggle for many working mothers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gender roles still exist creating barriers to career growth associated with female leaders being responsible for most non-paid domestic and childcare responsibilities.

Working mothers continue to face obstacles and perceptions associated with traditional gender roles that can create barriers that limit career growth.

**Barriers:**

Reduction in spontaneous cross-functional interactions, reducing personal brand exposure opportunities when operating remotely.

The hybrid workplace model limits the amount of in-person interaction and reduces opportunities for building or nurturing personal brand equity beyond female leaders' regular sphere of interactions.

The remote working component of the hybrid workplace model is creating a barrier described as an out-of-sight, out-of-mind dilemma for many female leaders seeking to raise their personal brand equity.

**Barriers:**

Barriers to career growth emerging in a hybrid workplace model, related to a decrease in access to natural synergies and growth opportunities.

Decrease in spontaneous knowledge sharing creating obstacles for aspiring female leaders career growth in hybrid.

Recognition that barriers female leaders face that increasing the need to be intentional in creating serendipitous pathways to career journey in hybrid.

**Barriers:**

Barriers such as the formation of exclusive clicks, silos, and sub-cultures beginning to emerge during COVID-19 creating challenges to team dynamics and social cohesion leading to disunity in hybrid.

Emergence of new obstacles to maintaining a strong corporate culture in a hybrid workplace model and sense of inclusion and belonging.

**Theme 5:**

Heightened Strain for Working Mothers Balancing Work-Life in Hybrid

**Theme 6:**

Personal Brand Equity Obstacles for Female Leaders in Hybrid

**Theme 7:**

Career Advancement Obstacles and Decreased Serendipitous Opportunities for Aspiring Female Leaders in Hybrid

**Theme 8:**

Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid

Identification of barriers female leaders must face when transitioning to leading in a hybrid workplace model including generational differences contributing to disunity among teams operating in hybrid.

**Barriers:**

Existence of work-life balance barriers contributing to mental health struggles experienced by many female leaders.

Increase in mental health struggles related to uncertainty and change associated with the transition to hybrid.

Increase of issues such as stress, anxiety, burnout, and feelings of isolation, loneliness, and social phobia associated with COVID-19 and during the transition and evolution of adopting a hybrid workplace model.

**Barriers:**

Barriers exist associated with establishing trust in a hybrid workplace model, which is essential to maintaining a high level of performance and productivity in distributed teams.

Barriers exist related to establishing trust in a hybrid workplace model exist due to decreased visibility of employee performance.

Employees resistance to change requires a modified approach to building trust that meets the individual needs of each employee in a hybrid workplace model.

**Opportunities:**

Creation of common language around mental health and well-being recognized as an opportunity for improving mental health.

Increased resources available presents an opportunity for enhancing mental health support with companies' recognizing the importance of helping employees be resilience and adaptable.

Normalization of prioritizing self-care including mental health and well-being an opportunity to help female leaders achieve a better work-life balance.

Opportunity to establish a better connection between prioritizing mental health and establishing a better work-life balance possible in a hybrid workplace model.

**Theme 9:**

Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid

**Theme 10:**

Need for Female Leaders to Modify Their Approach to Establishing Trust in Hybrid

**Theme 11:**

Prioritization of Mental Health Through Individualized Self-Care and Work-Life Balance in Hybrid

**Opportunities:**

Opportunity to embrace the importance of self-efficacy and intentional creation of serendipitous opportunities in hybrid with potential to lead to purpose driven career growth for female leaders.

Potential exists to create new career growth opportunities and identify new types of synergies in a flexible operating structure.

Transition to hybrid workplace model has created an opportunity for female leaders to prioritize self-reflecting and re-evaluating their sense of purpose – professionally and personally.

Opportunity to better understand how to navigate the emerging hybrid workplace serendipity gap.

**Theme 12:**

Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid

**Opportunities:**

Opportunity to leverage technology to effectively lead distributed teams.

Technology created an opportunity for flexible work, given the recognition that technology is the backbone that empowering flexible working options like the hybrid workplace model.

Technology empowers female leaders in hybrid to collaborate and engage.

**Theme 13:**

Technology Empowerment in Hybrid

**Opportunities:**

Opportunity during the transition to a hybrid workplace model to intentionally create a flexible unified operating structure that prioritizes establishing a cohesive team with shared culture, and shared understanding around achieving common goals.

The hybrid workplace model provides an opportunity to prioritize establishing a strong corporate culture focused on the individual needs of employees and humanization of the workplace further supporting unified teams.

**Theme 14:**

Purposeful Creation of Unified Teams in Hybrid

**Opportunities:**

Opportunity to embrace feminine leadership traits and soft skills when leading in hybrid.

Opportunity to lead authentically and prioritize increasing self-awareness, self-reflection, and personal growth when leading in a hybrid workplace model.

**Theme 15:**

Embracing Feminine Leadership Traits, Soft Skills, and Authenticity in Hybrid

**Opportunities:**

Opportunity for mentorship to be more accessible to female leaders in hybrid, allowing for increased knowledge sharing.

Opportunity for female leaders to intentionally establish and grown connections to mentors and support networks in a hybrid workplace model with no geographical restrictions.

Opportunity for increased access to support networks in a hybrid workplace model.

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**Theme 16:**

Increased Access to Mentors and Support Networks in Hybrid

**Table J2.***Categories and Themes for Research Question 2*

RQ2 Categories	RQ2 Themes
<p><b>Benefits of Situational Leadership® Style – Hybrid Workplace Model Specific:</b></p> <p>COVID-19 has initiated a paradigm shift towards a new normal – a flexible operating structure female leaders find themselves navigating.</p> <p>For many knowledge workers, the future of work involves adopting a hybrid workplace model, offering the best of both worlds and creating a new normal for female leaders.</p> <p>Many knowledge workers refuse to return to the traditional operating structure and desire more flexibility.</p>	<p><b>Theme 1:</b></p> <p>The Future of Work is Hybrid for Many Knowledge Workers</p>
<p><b>Benefits of Situational Leadership® Style – Hybrid Workplace Model Specific:</b></p> <p>The flexible nature of the hybrid workplace model is dynamic and individualized, allowing each company and department to customize the flexible operating structure to meet their specific needs.</p> <p>The hybrid workplace model is emerging, transforming, and evolving how, where, and when work is performed.</p>	<p><b>Theme 2:</b></p> <p>Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model</p>
<p><b>Situational Leadership® Style:</b></p> <p>Situational Leadership® style focuses on taking an employee-centric approach to leading by taking time to understand each individual employee genuinely.</p> <p>Situational Leadership® style involves adapting your leadership style to each individual employee within the context also of the emergence of complex and flexible operating structures such as the hybrid workplace model.</p> <p>Situational Leadership® style places a high level of importance on understanding employees’ individual strengths, challenges, experiences, skills, and aspirations.</p>	<p><b>Theme 17:</b></p> <p>The Benefits of Taking an Individualized Leadership Approach Compatible with the Complex and Flexible Nature of the Hybrid Workplace Models</p>

**Situational Leadership® Style:**

Situational Leadership® style aligns with the importance of resilience, empathy, and role modeling during times of transition, such as the adoption of a hybrid workplace model.

Situational Leadership® style allows leaders in hybrid to modify and adjust their leadership style to meet the needs during change and uncertainty.

Situational Leadership® style enables leaders to adapt leadership style during times of change based on the dynamic and evolving needs of employees.

**Situational Leadership® Style:**

The situational Leadership® style creates a level of trust that helps to establish a strong culture of trust between employees and leaders and among hybrid teams.

Situational Leadership® style priorities leaders gaining an in-depth understanding of employees, contributing to the establishment and nurturing of trust, leading to providing employees greater autonomy, and resisting micromanaging.

Situational Leadership® style promotes a sense of vulnerability with leaders and employees being transparent and authentic as they get to know and understand one another.

**Situational Leadership® Style:**

Situational Leadership® style prioritizes understanding each employee hence recognizing the importance of being accessible and having meaningful conversations with employees as a leader.

Situational Leadership® style promotes leaders modifying communications to ensure the message is received by all employees who each have individual communication preferences.

Situational Leadership® style supports that transparency and consistency of communication among all key stakeholders.

**Theme 18:**

The Benefits of Being an Adaptable Leadership Approach During Times of Change and Uncertainty

**Theme 19:**

The Benefits of Empowering Employees and Cultivating Trust in a Hybrid Workplace Model

**Theme 20:**

The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model

**Situational Leadership® Style:**

Situational Leadership® style as a highly adaptable leadership style supports leading in a manner that creates a sense of belonging and unity during times of change and uncertainty.

Situational Leadership® style encourages and supports team engagement and collaboration by focusing on establishing understanding and support across teams that are in-person or remote, recognition of a softening of the hierarchical structure.

Situational Leadership® style recognized the importance of leveraging technology to support teams' collaboration, while ensuring to tailor leadership style to the needs of the hybrid workplace model.

**Situational Leadership® Style:**

Situational Leadership® style believes in leaders understanding employees' areas of growth and potential and helping to nurture employee's skills and capabilities.

Situational Leadership® style encourages continuous learning, skill development, and sharing of knowledge.

Situational Leadership® style is a strong supporter of having a growth mindset.

**Situational Leadership® Style:**

The situational Leadership® style encourages leaders to be purpose-driven leaders and lead authentically, beginning with raising their level of self-awareness.

Situational Leadership® style focuses on leveraging intuition when connecting with employees and intuitively adapting the leadership style based on individual needs.

Situational Leadership® style requires leaders to intentionally take action that is purposeful particularly when it comes to creating a safe environment, intentionally creating a culture of support, encouragement, and understanding.

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**Theme 21:**

The Benefits of Team Engagement and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace Model

**Theme 22:**

The Benefits of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and Growth Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model

**Theme 23:**

The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model

### Appendix K: Data Triangulation Table

Efforts were made to ensure that the findings in this study, which include the emergence of a final code framework consisting of 52 codes associated with 23 themes providing answers to RQ1 and RQ2, have a strong level of reliability and validity by triangulating the data gathered during the one-on-one interviews and comparing and confirming the interview data against two other sources, including literature review data and observational notes taken during each interview. Table K1 summarizes the data triangulation for RQ1, including Themes 3–16, and Table K2 summarizes the data triangulation for RQ2, including Themes 1–2, and Themes 17–23.

**Table K1***Triangulation of Data Findings for Research Question 1*

Themes	Interview Data	Literature Review Peer-Reviewed Data	Observational Notes
<p><b>Theme 3:</b> Advancing Gender Equality in Hybrid</p>	<p>Participant 5 raises the importance of not simply achieving gender equality from a number's perspective and shares, "I think for me the goal, I think the minimum standard we should aim for is that people feel welcome at work. If you're just diverse, you've just checked a box for inclusion; it means you invited someone to a party, but it doesn't mean they will feel welcome when they show up. The minimum standard is welcome."</p> <p>"It's come a long way. I would say it's very important. Several years back, I'm not sure of the exact date, but they made it very clear that most, at our most senior levels, were looking for gender parity. And I think we have made inroads" (Participant 1).</p> <p>Participant 8 provided an example of how important achieving gender equality is within her organization and said, "We have six values. One of them is called Raise the Bar on Talent and Diversity. And we get rated on that.</p>	<p>"The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic can degrade progress made towards women's rights and gender equality" (Soares &amp; Sidun, 2021, p. 134).</p> <p>"Working from home gives rise to additional family demands resulting from greater proximity and accessibility" (Feng &amp; Savani, 2020, p. 723).</p> <p>"A future research avenue is not only to track the number of women in leader positions in various organizational sectors, before and after COVID-19 but also to look throughout the hierarchy at the ranks of precarious women to investigate how the current crisis is providing an environment where patriarchy is re-embedding. This will undoubtedly help to challenge the increasingly hierarchical and inequitable structures of organizations and academia" (Mavin &amp; Yusupova, 2020, p. 742).</p> <p>"Our research suggests that unexpected crises can create a gender gap in work outcomes when none existed previously. Given that the Covid-19</p>	<p><b>Emotional Verbal Expression Observation:</b> Participant 5 exhibited various emotions when speaking about gender equality in the workplace demonstrating a sincere and personal desire to be vulnerable and open when answering interview questions.</p> <p><b>Non-Verbal Expression Observation:</b> Facial expressions of Participant 5 explained during the interview genuine care and personal interest in discussing the topic of gender equality in the workplace. The participant remained highly focused and engaged throughout the interview.</p> <p><b>Facial Expression Observation:</b> Participant 1 looked very comfortable and highly knowledgeable when responding to questions related to gender equality in the hybrid workplace model, maintaining eye contact, and being expressive when speaking about gender equality in the workplace.</p> <p><b>Emotional Verbal Expression and Metaphor Observation:</b> While speaking about the glass ceiling still being a relevant metaphor for representing</p>

And when we say diversity, that means female leadership. The goal is to get to 50% women in leadership. In Canada, what we look for in diversity. It's extremely important.”

According to Participant 16, “The glass ceiling’s not completely gone”. Participant 16 shared a personal experience explaining how “I’ve had recent incidents again where...one was a gentleman has just joined the company and we were working on a project all remote and he didn’t know me very well, but I would say maybe twice in my career I’ve ever spoken up about how condescending someone would be. And he was explaining my slides back to me and I was like, “Look, I know I’ve never met you and whatever.” But I said, ‘That’s condescending and please stop talking to me like that because this is my material. You don’t need to explain it to me.’ And he didn’t like it, but again, I did repair it. I ended up having to do a Zoom call and go like, ‘Look, I’m not gonna tolerate that.’ I’ve been around for a long time, and I don’t care who you are, but you don’t be condescending to me.” And that’s sort of not something that I would say I normally have to deal with because you

pandemic is unlikely to be resolved in the near future, the gender gaps that we identified are likely to persist. Even after the pandemic, if organizations adopt widespread work-from-home policies, such gender gaps might continue to persist. More broadly, decades-long trends toward gender equality in the workplace might be reversed due to these changes. Our research suggests that management researchers and practitioners need to pay careful attention to this issue.” (Feng & Savani, 2020, p. 729).

“Women are battling COVID-19 and the patriarchy in organizations” (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020, p. 724).

barriers female leaders experience as they strive to advance their career, Participant 16’s tone emphasized words she used to describe the struggles female leaders continue to experience based on her personal experience.

#### **Emotional Verbal**

##### **Expression Observation:**

Participant 8 expressed with a change in tone the importance of her company’s commitment to gender equality by emphasizing her company’s gender equality goal.

work with someone you see them in person and whatever and this was not that situation.”

**Theme 4:**  
Leak in the Pipeline of Female Leaders in Hybrid

“I’ve seen a huge change in the pipeline of females leaders, especially working moms after the pandemic” (Participant 2).

Participant 17 discussed the importance of taking steps to improve the pipeline of female leaders by saying “We want to understand what our gaps are in our population and our leadership pipeline, and then build a plan for that.”

Participant 14 shared an experience of female leaders having to make the difficult decision to leave the workplace in search of more flexible positions, saying “we have a lot of those challenges. The employee I was speaking about, she left the company because after a period, we provided like we offered other flexibility and other ways that she could maybe have a reduced schedule, but she didn’t want reduced pay and all those kinds of things that come along with sacrificing or with making those hard decisions.”

The leak in the pipeline has also included retirements for example,

Grangeiro et al. acknowledge weak representation of female talent throughout each stage in the pipeline from entry level to middle management and senior leadership (Grangeiro et al., 2021).

Scholars Nicolò et al. identify issues with the pipeline of female leaders pre-COVID-19 pandemic who are being positioned for senior leadership positions (Nicolò et al., 2021).

A issue with the pipeline support female leaders career growth is a serious issue, according to scholars Erkal et al. “helping women improve their performance through training programs may not help reduce the gender gap because the gender gap exists even when the subjects know that they are the top performers” (Erkal et al., 2021, p. 12).

“Implication on career growth in a hybrid model, uncertain” (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021, p. 8).

**Emotional Verbal Expression and Metaphor**

**Observation:** Participant 2 used the metaphor of the pipeline explicitly using this metaphor to describe the gap in the workplace concerning female leaders holding senior leadership positions.

Participant 2 seemed visibly frustrated that she could not accommodate the requests by aspiring female leaders for mentorship support by female leaders because of the leak in the pipeline.

**Reflection on Personal Experience Observation:**

Participant 2 was open and vulnerable in sharing a challenge her company is experiencing due to a leak in the pipeline of female leaders, causing challenges and frustration in finding enough senior female leaders to accommodate the ten requests by female leaders for mentors.

**Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:**

Participant 14 openly spoke about her frustration with female leaders leaving the workplace in search of more flexible operating structures. Explicitly admitting “we have a lot of those challenges” (Participant 14).

“I’ve seen a lot of people retire early. I’ve seen a lot of individuals that were previously considering management positions no longer doing so, a lot less sponsorship and mentorship, just because executives are tired” (Participant 2).

**Theme 5:**  
Heightened  
Strain for  
Working  
Mothers  
Balancing  
Work–Life in  
Hybrid

Participant 14 recognized that although the schools are now open when female leaders are working remotely, even in a hybrid model, there are often periods when female leaders still must balance work and children at home, for example the time before and after school where many children are home when female leaders are working (Participant 14).

“Well, I think that it’s interesting because if I think about it, it all goes back to lack of trust in a way. Because and assumptions. And so, my lens is really around women that have children or caregiving because I think that’s the perception that, oh, they’re just going to be at their home with their kids, or now they’re going to be taking all this time, extra time to do all these things that have nothing to do with work. I think it goes back a lot to those gender roles. I think that those assumptions are what kind of get in the way because automatically it’s this,

“Mothers are more likely to have had their careers disrupted which risks work and career progression in a context where progress in closing the gender wage gap had already stalled” (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020, p. 740).

“We might have expected work from home to benefit women, but COVID-19 imposed heavier burdens on work-from-home mothers than on work-from-home fathers” (Kulik, 2022, p. 223).

“We might have expected work from home to benefit women, but COVID-19 imposed heavier burdens on work-from-home mothers than on work-from-home fathers” (Kulik, 2022, p. 223).

“Mothers are more likely to have had their careers disrupted which risks work and career progression in a context where progress in closing the gender wage gap had already stalled” (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020, p. 740).

**Reflection on Personal Experiences Observation:**

Participant 1 shared a personal experience that she admitted was embarrassing of a time when she was “hosting a meeting with 50 people” virtually from home when her son interrupted the meeting by saying for all to hear, “Mom, I gotta poop” demonstrating some of the challenges working mothers experienced. Participant 1 was laughing at the situation. Participant 1 also shared personal stories of overall interruptions by children for support with Google during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Emotional Verbal Expression, Explicit Description Observation:**

Participant 1 explicitly described her personal experience of having support from her husband but ultimately still having to take on most of the household responsibilities, explicitly using the term “traditional gender roles in the home.”

okay, well, she's at home, so she's cooking and she's cleaning and she's doing all these other things. And it's just when I think about its kind of ridiculous" (Participant 13).

Participant 1 said, "So as a female leader, I am independent, and I have a very wonderful husband, and he is an understanding guy, but despite who is the primary earner, we still do have somewhat traditional roles, where I do the majority of the cooking, the cleaning, the laundry, the organization of children and everything else," associated with traditional gender roles in the home. Participant 1 shared a personal story about hosting a meeting with 30 senior executives. During the meeting, her child interrupted her several times, saying, "Mom, I need help with this, Mom, help, I need to switch between Google Meet or Mom, I need help going on this site...It was more challenging for us because of the multiple hats that we were wearing."

**Theme 6:**  
Personal  
Brand Equity  
Obstacles for  
Female  
Leaders in  
Hybrid

A very interesting barrier that emerged from the study findings relates to the existence of a new phenomenon described in this study as an "out-of-sight, out-of-mind dilemma" (Participant 6)

"Out of sight, out of mind - emphasizes the relevance of the psychological contract" (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 10).

"Do workers who remain onsite have an advantage

**Emotional Verbal  
Expression, Explicit**

**Description Observation:** Participant 6 used the exact words "out-of-sight, out-of-mind dilemma" to describe her personal experience with overcoming career growth

that relates to increased obstacles female leaders face in establishing strong personal brand awareness in a hybrid workplace model due to the significant reduction of opportunities to connect and the potential decreased visibility and exposure to decision-makers when working remotely.

“I think, you know what, one of the things I’ve probably done is because there were in the like pure sort of COVID lockdowns. And so, any opportunity for random collisions in person was sort of taken away. You had to be more conscious about either having weekly scheduled meetings, or it’s like, you must reach out to me if you need something” (Participant 10).

The hybrid workplace model is a flexible operating structure that includes a balance of working in-office and remotely, therefore reducing the opportunities for female leaders to build brand equity given the reduction of in-person networking opportunities and decrease in opportunities to interact with leaders and decision-makers in-person (Participant 12) Participant 6 explained, “I think that’s why we are back 2 days a week. While we can effectively

when it comes to career development and promotional opportunities” (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021, p. 9).

“Perceived fear of career opportunities suffering because of decreased visibility, conversely, the worker that remains on-site has a clear advantage over teleworking colleagues in promotion and career development” (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021, p. 9).

When evaluating the glass ceiling more specifically “looking at ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’ barriers at societal, organizational, and individual level which constrain women. These barriers have re-emerged with more power than ever before during COVID-19 and have tremendous impact on women” (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020, p. 740).

“Perceived risk of lack of career growth if employees spend too much time working remotely, putting them at a competitive disadvantage to those in-office” (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021, p. 8).

“Implication on career growth in a hybrid model, uncertain” (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021, p. 8).

barriers as a female leader in a hybrid workplace model.

#### **Non-verbal Cue, Facial Expression Observation:**

Participant 15 when discussing the barrier of personal brand equity in a hybrid model related to out-of-sight, out-of-mind and how she intentionally ensures that she is present in the office when she knows decision makers are in the office her facial expressions changed and you could see the passion and dedication she has to being proactive and intentional when it comes to her career growth based on her words and non-verbal cues.

work on a project, a paper, or whatever at home, being completely disconnected creates an out of sight, out of mind disadvantage.”

**Theme 7:**  
Career  
Advancement  
Obstacles and  
Decreased  
Serendipitous  
Opportunities  
for Aspiring  
Female  
Leaders in  
Hybrid

“What I found is that some of our younger lawyers who are only in 2 days a week are a little disconnected. Don’t have as much of a connection, and we’ve lost some of those people. And that to me makes complete sense because every time over my career that I’ve really... And really, it’s been two times where I’ve really had a good offer from someone somewhere else, really contemplated a change” (Participant 12).

“New opportunities? I think it, because we’ve become much more comfortable in this digital world, I think as much as naturally we network very well in person, having the ability to reach out to someone who’s in an elevated role within the organization and schedule a 15-minute Zoom or, I’m just looking at opportunities for career growth” (Participant 1).

“And then they have connection with other people that are in the office. You have that in person serendipity or serendipitous moments as well. I think there’s value in all of it, but

“Perceived risk of lack of career growth if employees spend too much time working remotely, putting them at a competitive disadvantage to those in-office” (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021, p. 8).

“Perceived fear of career opportunities suffering because of decreased visibility, conversely, the worker that remains on-site has a clear advantage over teleworking colleagues in promotion and career development” (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021, p. 9).

Employees fear that they will not be promoted or access career development if they are not in person due to “decreased visibility” (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021, p. 9).

“Do workers who remain onsite have an advantage when it comes to career development and promotional opportunities” (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021, p. 9).

Random knowledge sharing is according to scholars has the potential to be impacted in a purely remote or hybrid workplace model “when working from the office, some informants explained

**Non-Verbal, Facial**

**Expression Observation:**

Participant 12 when speaking about the younger aspiring leaders showed on her family genuine empathy and concern for the future of lawyer’s ability to advance their careers if they choose not to spend time in the office.

**Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:**

Participant 7 was vulnerable and openly shared a personal experience that was a barrier advancement that she had to overcome related to the hybrid workplace, which was the need to overcome decreased in-person time with decision-makers that had influence over her promotion. Participant 7 spoke emotionally about having to work even harder to prove that she was ready for career advancement, mature enough to handle the responsibilities, despite receiving feedback that she may not be ready due to “maturity level” (Participant 7) that she believed was influences largely since she could not hide the reality that she still lived at home. Participant 7 was promoted, but she expressed with emotion her personal belief that it was harder to gain visibility from leaders when remote.

	<p>certain tasks I don't necessarily know. I think human beings are extremely adaptable and we can figure it out" (Participant 5).</p>	<p>that they were included in discussions that they would normally not be part of" (Semsøy, 2022, p. 34).</p>	
<p><b>Theme 8:</b> Risk of Emerging Exclusive Sub-Cultures and Team Disunity in Hybrid</p>	<p>When discussing the new emergence of exclusive sub-cultures because of the pandemic, initial purely remote workplace, and now hybrid model Participant 1 said "...we've got these different silos where I can explain it for distribution, but that would be very different versus broader than our company's."</p>	<p>"Hybrid models pose critical organizational challenges for employers, related to the smooth blending of on-site and remote workers - Challenges are grouped into three categories: bricks, bytes, and behaviour" (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021, p. 12).</p>	<p><b>Interaction with Others Observation:</b> Participant 11 shares a personal account of an experience she had that lead her to believe and feel that the hybrid workplace model was having a negative effect on teams' level of unity, creating in many cases according to Participant 11 unintentional "soloing" between those employees who joined the company before the pandemic and those employees who joined during the pandemic.</p>
	<p>"For sure. I call it high school. So, there are some cliques. From people that were just comfortable always doing the same thing that I would categorize them mostly as employees that are...They're not good with change" (Participant 2).</p>	<p>"Shared understanding evolves naturally when members can develop a sense of their team's culture, a shared framework through which they interpret events. This is not the case for remote where this natural development is challenged in virtual teams" (Kozlowski et al., 2021, p. 3).</p>	<p><b>Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:</b> Participant 8 when discussing her experience as a senior leader that is new to her organization said with a change in tone and emotion as a new employee, she found it "harder to get to know people and to really develop relationships with people." The tone Participant 8 used was that of concern, which she also verbally shared explaining her concern for the potential of other new employees perhaps facing a similar experience and shared a personal story of how she helps new employees feel more welcome, an action she believes requires intentionally when in a hybrid workplace model.</p>
	<p>"Innovation happens without us even noticing. And that is like your bench lab work. Like actually, 'oh, what about this and what about that?' One of the issues they had with the younger generation who's never been to work before because they just graduated at COVID, was that they would set up their experiment for half an hour and go home" (Participant 3).</p>	<p>"Despite most employees being satisfied with remote working, it must be taken into consideration that all the pillars of organizational culture consolidated before the pandemic, such as conversations, meeting and social contact being threatened by the lack of physical interactions between employees" (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021, 2309).</p>	<p>"Weakened team cohesion due to a lack of social interaction when only</p>

	<p>“So, that was a big gap of our brand-new team of directors getting to know each other. And then we'd set something up and then someone would be like, who's going to be outside? It was individual food, all this kind of nonsense. And then they would cancel the day of because they would be nervous” (Participant 3).</p>	<p>working virtually” (Semsøy, 2022, p. 30).</p>	
<p><b>Theme 9:</b> Rise in Female Leaders Experiencing Mental Health Struggles in Hybrid</p>	<p>According to all participants, a normalization occurred when it came to prioritizing mental health and creating a “common language” (Participant 8) around openly speaking about mental health and wellness at work.</p>	<p>“A common disadvantage of virtual work is an expectation that individuals are ‘on call’ to work at all hours” (Kozlowski et al., 2021, p. 8).</p>	<p><b>Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:</b> Participant 5 shared a deeply personal experience where she experienced mental health challenges and made the decision to take a five month leave of absence. Participant 5 was focused, engaged, and emotional as she said “So personally for me, I took a leave of absence, I recently took a leave of absence and I was gone for five months, and I think part of the strategy for me was recognizing that I needed a break, and that was very, very difficult to admit, because that felt like failure that felt like, again, you're supposed to just suck it up and carry on and you can't let them see you break and you can't let them see all of this and realizing that I wasn't leading by example, if I did that.”</p>
	<p>Some participants took the mental health of their employees, particularly during the peak of the pandemic, so seriously that they strategically outlined “watch lists” (Participant 8), which identified employees most at risk from a mental health perspective, and leaders intentionally reached out to those employees regularly, many included working mothers balancing work–life during the pandemic lockdown.</p>	<p>“Work–life balance can suffer for those employees unable to differentiate between work and personal time” (Weideman &amp; Hofmeyr, 2020, p. 13).</p>	<p><b>Body Language Observation:</b> When speaking about the importance of mental health and discussing the rise in mental health struggles with employees over the pandemic and during this</p>
	<p>Participant 4 said, “I would say probably that I have friends who have children; they're able to pick up their kids at a certain time and be home</p>	<p>“Zoom fatigue” (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021, p. 13).</p>	
		<p>“Stacking of online meetings without breaks contributed even more to fatigue - Unlike in-office meetings where individuals will more likely to move to different meeting rooms, verse remaining in the same room often without natural breaks” (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021, p.13).</p>	
		<p>Working remotely has increased the “mental health issues related to isolation” (Ng et al., 2021, p. 15).</p>	

for them, and then they log in at different times to compensate, and they work around that, which I think has allowed that aspect of work–life balance to be successful.”

“The biggest thing that I have learned over all of this is that life is a paradox and that it is non-binary in every shape and form, there is no either-or, there is no on-off, in-out, up-down, very rarely. We can hold conflicting spaces, and I think that was my biggest lesson and mantra: if you’re sad right now, be sad. That’s okay because you can be sad and grateful, you can be scared and hopeful, you can be all at once, you can be petrified about what’s happening with your health and your children and their health, and yet grateful that they’re being homeschooled and safe at home” (Participant 5).

**Theme 10:**  
Need for  
Female  
Leaders to  
Modify Their  
Approach to  
Establishing  
Trust in  
Hybrid

“It’s an issue of trust and knowing who your team is. Get to know them better and know them as human beings, and it’ll be much easier to understand what they’re going through. And then we don’t take it as personally. Because if I know that you are struggling with something that I might not have known before...I can realize this isn’t them being lazy. I can stop and say, is

“Remote work during the pandemic has been linked to fatigue and depression” (Ng et al., 2021, p. 6).

The Gartner Group reports that “although virtual teaming is considered easy — just do what you usually do to collaborate and do it with technology — from 50 percent, to upwards as high as 82 percent, of virtual teams fail because they have difficulty collaborating, developing a shared understanding of goals and tasks, and surmounting challenges with respect to trust and social cohesion”

transition to a new normal, Participant 11 demonstrated body language such as nodding her head and maintaining eye contact signifying the importance of the topic.

**Interactions with Others  
and Explicit Description**

**Observation:** Participant 10 when speaking about the importance of building trust among the team in a hybrid workplace model, said while being very engaged and focused on our conversation “I think that’s just like building trust. Making sure that what I’ve said to everybody is like, look, just drop sometime in my calendar, drop some time in my calendar. And I just sent a message, and I’m going to

everything okay? Ask if you need my support anywhere?” (Participant 5).

“We had this is the set meeting for production meetings, here’s the set meeting for this. It was much more regimented pre-COVID. And, but it was still very and I’m talking about my management style, it was it was still very base centered on personal relationships, knowing your team, trusting, they trust you, you trust them. Open transparent conversations” (Participant 1).

“A lot of what we do is based on trust and I’ve got good trust with my employees. It is a little bit harder to establish trust with individuals that you haven’t met because they got hired during the pandemic kind of thing. I do feel like that trust, if you will, has improved in a hybrid model because at least you’re having those face-to-face interactions and supplementing those relationships that you’ve, maybe, not had as close as you would have in traditional model beforehand” (Participant 2).

(Kozlowski et al., 2021, p. 1).

“One of the reasons why virtual team members under both leaders lacked trust and team cohesion was because there was no face-to-face meetings or video conferencing during the earlier stage of the team. This finding affirmed the assertion of several earlier researchers” (Maduka et al., 2018, p. 708).

“Employers expressed their preference for hybrid working in terms of maintaining power, and this corroborates studies that highlight managerial concerns (e.g. trust and performance uncertainty) as one of the constraints of remote working” (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 9).

see if she replied. Yep, she did. So, I said to her, drop sometime in my calendar today. And she did at noon right after this.” Participant 10 then took a very brief break from our interview, checked her messages, and confirmed that the employee she asked to meet with so that she could be accessible to helping the employee had booked a meeting with her demonstrating her commitment to building trust and supporting her employees as a leader.

**Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:**

Participant 8 explained with the emotion of guilt and disappointment in herself a personal event that took place where she feels she let the team down and missed an opportunity to build trust as a leader. Participant 8 said, “...it was more like how I gain my team’s trust that I have their best interests at heart and that I can negotiate on their behalf. And so that one did not work well. I thought everyone wanted Tuesday and Wednesday and I thought that if I also said Tuesday and Wednesday someone would get forced to Friday and it might be me and I really didn’t want Friday...I screwed up that negotiation pretty badly. And I’m worried that it looks to them like I didn’t manage their best interest, whereas I was trying to, but I’m not going to explain it to them. Never going to sit there and go through the whole calculus, doesn’t help anything.”

**Theme 11:**  
Prioritization  
of Mental  
Health  
Through  
Individualized  
Self-Care and  
Work–Life  
Balance in  
Hybrid

“It’s not something that started and ended and we can all move on and can maybe erase it from our consciousness. I think it’s hard to say, well, hey, let’s do more in person and let’s collaborate more in the studio and get back to that how we were, when there are now an increase cases for example, and people that have concerns around health and well-being with themselves and their families. I don’t think it’s over, that’s why it’s tough to really know where we’re going to land” (Participant 4).

“We were living in the upside down and figuring out how we can, I mean, we had to humanize the employment experience. Now it’s not just, we had to look, we must look at whole human beings, not components. And that’s the fundamental change, at least for me. And my leadership style, is recognizing there is a whole human being in front of me, not just employee 14,725” (Participant 5).

“Workers used to find it challenging to manage work and family/life commitments, even before the pandemic era” (Ng et al., 2021).

“The hybrid workplace is the future and can help organizations and especially employees achieve a balance between work and personal activities” (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 7).

Many female leaders are prioritizing their mental health and well-being when working in hybrid by “creating boundaries” (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 7) between work and life particularly when working from home.

“The advantages that this situation has brought to employees and organizations include the following: (1) Reduction of transportation times and the associated environmental impact; (2) Better productivity and better time management; (3) Balance between family and work, associated with a potential for greater happiness; (4) An increased feeling of protection and security regarding the potential effects of the pandemic; (5) The opportunity to access talent without geographical boundaries; (6) Implement of new processes aligned with remote work; (7) Strengthening corporate culture; and (8) Reduction in real estate costs” (de

**Body Language**

**Observation:** Participant 4, when speaking about the importance of being there for employees’ mental health, moved closer to her computer camera and spoke very openly and genuinely about the topic.

**Emotional Verbal**

**Expression and Explicit Description Observation:**

Participant 14 demonstrated empathetic emotions when speaking about the flexible operating model now allowing female leaders with opportunity to prioritize their mental health, vulnerably sharing how a personal experience about the female leader perspective during the pandemic. Participant 14 said in a caring and sincere tone “I think I had maybe more perspective on that maybe compared to some of my male partners. I would say it was a challenge. I think the hardest part probably as a female leader was watching some of my female staff members struggle with it, having children home, trying to work, trying to be everything to everybody. I watched one of my staff that was directly reporting to me, really, really struggled that actually ended up having like a mental health breakdown through it.”

**Emotional Verbal**

**Expression Observation:**

Participant 13 expressed the emotion of happiness when saying “the opportunity for less stress, for better mental health and well-being physically, there’s so many pluses, I think, with having

**Theme 12:**  
Purpose-Driven Career Growth and Intentional Cultivation of Serendipitous Opportunities in Hybrid

“Career growth specifically. I do feel that in the past you'd be able to kind of move up into leadership positions, mentorship, sponsorship was more fluid than it is now in remote. It was kind of top of mind, and you naturally go for coffee, and it was much more natural. Now in terms of career development, while you've...Everybody has always been...Like you must create your own path” (Participant 2).

“And I would still say and maybe I'm a bit old fashioned for this, but I would still say err on the side of caution and probably like, I would still go over and above in terms of if you really want to grow and you want to develop, then you need to show that commitment...even if that means you're the only one in the office that day” (Participant 1).

“The other day they posted a senior director job, and I emailed the person. My boss was away so, I didn't talk to her about it, which I don't think she loved, but she was gone for 3 weeks. So, sent an email and said, 'Hey, I'm not sure if you have someone in mind for this, but like to chat about it.' And we had a lovely 15-minute chat.

Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021, p. 2308).

“Intentionally orchestrate social interaction between colleagues” (Wethal et al., 2022, p. 332).

“Leaders must be intentional as they convey relevant information about normative expectations and appropriate behaviors and develop a positive team culture remotely. During the team's initial interactions, leaders should model appropriate actions and desired behaviors” (Kozłowski et al., 2021, p. 5).

“Trust and autonomy are essential parts of a hybrid working culture. When workers become less visible to management, leaders of visibility and to keep productivity high” (Hacker et al., 2020, p. 14).

remote and hybrid workplaces.”

**Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:**

Participant 15 spoke emotionally while being open and engaging about the importance of female leaders having the power to create career growth opportunities in the new hybrid workplace model. Participant 15 spoke more intensely when she spoke of the humanization of the workplace creating opportunities for female leaders.

**Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:**

Participant 15 also spoke in an excited tone when discussing how opportunities for intentional actions that can have positive effects on female leader's career growth are increasing with the flexibility of the hybrid workplace model, with her tone increasing with excitement when she said “we're getting a more intimate look into people's lives...when would I ever been in my boss's house in previous lives? It's very kind of cool, it's almost the breaking of the fourth wall.”

**Body Language**

**Observation:** Participant 8 changed her body language by sitting more upright and leaning into the camera on the computer in an engaging manner when talking about opportunities that do exist for female leaders to thrive in a hybrid workplace model when being intentional and

And then she had never heard about my career aspirations before. She's like, 'I hear great things about you.' And then she learned about them and then now I have a chat with the EVP [executive vice president] next week about it" (Participant 3).

**Theme 13:**  
Technology  
Empowerment  
in Hybrid

"...it forced our business to evolve much faster than I think it would've without COVID from a digitization and respectfully getting the regulators out of the way because we had to move to operate in more of a digital capacity" (Participant 1).

"In many ways, we have embraced the tools, COVID has forced us to embrace the tools which we now have, and so we actually collaborate better. It doesn't matter that we're not in there at the same time, it's a non-event. We work seamlessly virtually, I would say" (Participant 6).

"And I think the companies that are getting it are on their way to succeed, I think, and technology as an enabler versus something that is really draining energy" (Participant 13).

"Readiness of technology as an enabler to remote working was overlooked by organizations implementing the practice" (Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020, p. 15).

"Companies with a high degree of digitalization were able to carry out this change process faster and more efficiently as compared to non-digitalized businesses" (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021, p. 2306).

"The critical competencies include "the ability to trust; build team orientation and integration; effective communication; personal characteristics; goal direction; providing constant feedback; operational coordinating and conflict resolution ability; technology skills/knowledge; awareness; quality decision making; monitoring change in environmental conditions; and reliability" (Maduka et al., 2018, pp. 700-703)

strategic about finding and acting on serendipitous opportunities. Participant 9 said "You must be much more intentional about what you're discussing. The serendipitous discoveries don't happen, I find, on Zoom, but I wouldn't wanna go back to five days in office either. I appreciate having the flexibility in my schedule and I appreciate being able to make time to easily speak to people, not even in the company."

**Change in Tone**

**Observation:** Participant 4 tone change to one of pride and happiness when speaking about her company's ability to adapt during the pandemic to a remote environment extremely well since her company had already adopted a technology infrastructure that enabled working from anywhere. "It was a platform that we had already adopted. And because we're a national practice, we were already used to working cross studio and cross city. For us it was literally, we made that decision, I believe it was the 1st week in March when we made the call to shut down our studios and to send staff remote" (Participant 4).

**Emotional and Explicit**

**Description Observation:** Participant 9 shared a personal experience in an emotional tone that was reflective of being content and grateful that when speaking about her company's ability to successfully leverage technology that allowed for

“We had to make it okay to just interrupt someone with a phone call, but be open to say, this is not a good time. I’m going to call you back, but maybe those check-ins. We used our technology quite a bit where we, I think everyone did this at first, right? Had virtual drinks on Fridays or had coffee chats, just so that people can see each other. And if people were not joining that then we had them escalate just to someone else just to say, ‘Hey, can someone just do a health check?’ Sorry, your other question was, one was on the culture” (Participant 17).

“The Gartner Group reports that although virtual teaming is considered easy — just do what you usually do to collaborate and do it with technology — from 50 percent, to upwards as high as 82%, of virtual teams fail because they have difficulty collaborating, developing a shared understanding of goals and tasks, and surmounting challenges with respect to trust and social cohesion” (Kozlowski et al., 2021, p. 1).

successful collaboration with her team and the entire company proud fully sharing a new technical initiative her company launched at the start of the pandemic that created a place for employees to socialize during the lockdown.

**Theme 14:**  
Purposeful  
Creation of  
Unified  
Teams in  
Hybrid

“You’re not collaborating in the same way. You’re don’t have to generate ideas. You’re executing. And I think the execution part of construction requires less of that, let’s call it creative process. For us, I would say, it really is on the front end when you’re generating ideas, you’re bringing in that kind of the ideas of forming and creation that is very hard to replicate in a meaningful way virtually. It can be done, but it’s painful in some ways” (Participant 4).

“And I love that, right? It just shows a humanity to everybody. I think as we’ve talked about and as we looked at our panel, I think that has

“The benefits of hybrid models will only be realized if work-based social connectedness is built into the organizational culture” (Kulik, 2022, p. 221).

The revolution of the workplace has allowed for the emergence of “forward-thinking corporate cultures” (Evans, 2022, p. 46).

“Leaders must be intentional as they convey relevant information about normative expectations and appropriate behaviors and develop a positive team culture remotely. During the team’s initial interactions, leaders should model appropriate actions and desired behaviors” (Kozlowski et al., 2021, p. 5).

**Verbal Change in Tone**

**Observation:** Participant 6 changed her tone, shifting to a joyful and optimistic tone when speaking positively about the opportunity the hybrid workplace model offers for employee engagement. “I think you have less of that corporate mask when you are more comfortable, and so the finding there was it actually bonded people faster, like manager to employee, so when they did finally meet in-person, they were hugging in a way that he would not start off with somebody you’re meeting for the very first time” (Participant 6).

**Non-Verbal, Facial**

**Expression Observation:** Participant 9 shifted her body language sitting upright and appearing highly engaged in the conversation when she

been consistent. I think what we're seeing is different companies handling it differently, some companies and big companies, we've got headquarters in different countries, so that's also driving some of the company culture" (Participant 6).

"And I think we're moving more towards community and seeing how that works, because the old system is, you know, all the old ways of doing things are, it doesn't serve us anymore. So, I think that's probably from a leadership style is, I don't have to be the loudest person in the room anymore" (Participant 5).

**Theme 15:**  
Embracing  
Feminine  
Leadership  
Traits, Soft  
Skills, and  
Authenticity  
in Hybrid

"I think females are better equipped to adapt to a hybrid model, we've had to do it our whole lives where again, you just wear so many different hats at so many different times, so I think we are better suited and all of the things that again, another term that I can't stand is the soft skills, those are not soft skills, all of the things that we're kind of again around the language surrounding that is there more feminine-attributed attributes like empathy and listening and all of these soft skills, it's like... Yeah, you try to do that on a regular basis and tell me how soft it is, so I think women are

"The critical competencies include "the ability to trust; build team orientation and integration; effective communication; personal characteristics; goal direction; providing constant feedback; operational coordinating and conflict resolution ability; technology skills/knowledge; awareness; quality decision making; monitoring change in environmental conditions; and reliability" (Maduka et al., 2018, pp. 700-703).

"The acquisition of soft skills for smart working is critical for the successful facilitation of remote working" (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 10).

said, "There are better opportunities. I would say the biggest thing that has benefited us and continues to be a great benefit is that we are far better at leveraging our national team. Like, it's so much more common to have the composition of a team for a certain mandate come from some people from Halifax, some people from Calgary, some people from Toronto."

**Emotional Verbal**

**Expression Observation:**

Participant 1 spoke with increased emotion and passion when she said, "I think candidly I think there's more empathy across the board. Because through COVID, we all looked into everyone's personal lives..."

**Emotional Verbal**

**Expression and Explicit Description Observation:**

Participant 11 spoke with emotion, excitement when discussing the importance of embracing new skills in the hybrid workplace model as a leader such as the ability to read body language remotely which on a video conference call. Participant 11 also spoke with passion about the importance of embracing the

better suited for it, actually, I think” (Participant 5).

“I think you have less of that corporate mask when you are more comfortable, and so the finding there was it actually bonded people faster, like manager to employee, so when they did finally meet in-person, they were hugging in a way that he would not start off with somebody you’re meeting for the very first time” (Participant 15).

“It’s understanding yourself and then understanding how you translate it into this world, so for example, I am all about moving things forward, one of the things that I sometimes I don’t share enough of this context in it, because I’m moving forward and in the world when we are all together, when we’re having a meeting together, it is very natural to say, Hey everybody, we are here together to achieve as specific goal, here’s why we’re going to achieve it that exists as a forum, and that naturally brings out the context” (Participant 6).

**Theme 16:**  
Increased  
Access to  
Mentors and  
Support  
Networks in  
Hybrid

“I think it, because we’ve become much more comfortable in this digital world, I think as much as naturally we network very well in person, having the ability to reach out to

“Need for more self-management skills and digital skills” (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021, p. 7).

“Soft skills are essential skills that are desired in all professions and business areas today, whose importance is increasing day by day and are known as 21st-century skills and are reshaped with digitalization and automation” (Urhan, 2023, p. 24).

The hybrid workplace model requires leaders to have soft skills such as the ability to navigate “complex social interactions” (Semsøy, 2022, p. 9) with “empathy” (Semsøy, 2022, p. 9).

“Many participants alluded to the importance of soft skills, such as creativity, innovation, setting expectations, humor, professionalism, good communication, a positive attitude, empathy and emotional intelligence” (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 10).

“Offices can become ‘workplace ecosystems’ where people go for learning development, collaborating, mentoring, socializing” (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021, p.12).

skill of being vulnerable with your team and embracing intuition.

**Change in Tone  
Observation:** Participant 8 changed her tone, passionately speaking about the importance of overcoming fear of networking, saying “...awkwardness only lasts

someone who's in an elevated role within the organization and schedule a 15-minute Zoom or, I'm just looking at opportunities for career growth" (Participant 1).

"...we have programs in place to, in terms of female sponsorship and mentorship to bring in and elevate existing staff that are female into leadership positions. That's number one. And then the other from external or from more of the partnership recruitment is that we do have kind of set mandates when we're putting candidates forward or individuals or companies forward when we merge or we're bringing new partners externally, is that that be a lens that be in place, as we consider individuals in bringing them into the partnership" (Participant 4).

"I think if you have one or two people who can advocate for you, then that's not so challenging. I think we still do recognize people who are, working above their level, and I think we make sure that we intentionally give those people access to different leaders so that they have other advocates and voices in the firm to support their advancement. We've had lots of people be promoted during the

Random knowledge sharing is easier "then working from the office, some informants explained that they were included in discussions that they would normally not be part of" (Semsøy, 2022, p. 34).

"Remote workers must also implement strategies that foster remote working effectiveness and fulfil organizational expectations, including greater work responsibility and accountability; the acquisition of soft skills; collaborative work; independent working; and social networking, to improve workplace communication" (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 15).

for like nine seconds. If you can deal with nine seconds of like, I don't know this person's name, they don't know why I'm saying hi. But introducing yourself to strangers is a great skill to have. Because you just don't know what you'll learn about people."

### **Body Language**

**Observation:** Participant 4 changed her body language by leaning into the camera on her computer when speaking passionately about the importance of mentorship in career growth.

pandemic, like I was promoted during the pandemic” (Participant 9).

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**Table K2***Triangulation of Data Findings for Research Question 2*

Themes	Interview Data	Literature Review Peer-Reviewed Data	Observational Notes / Researcher Notes-Reflections
<p><b>Theme 1:</b> The Future of Work is Hybrid for Many Knowledge Workers</p>	<p>Participant 2 stated, “I think the hybrid model will stay.”</p> <p>Participant 5 said that when asked if the hybrid workplace model will be the new normal, “It already is. And the employers that have figured that out are ahead of the game,” speaking to the desire by knowledge workers for the freedom to choose where they work best.</p> <p>Participant 7 said, “I do. I think hybrid will become the future. I think hybrid is critical for a couple of reasons. I think number one is that you must be a hybrid to be competitive and retain talents. Because I think many employees are looking for remote work.”</p> <p>“Now we have more choices, we have more options. Why would we say five of our options aren’t options? It just doesn’t make any sense to me personally. I don’t think we’ll ever be in a situation like it was during COVID, where we were mostly</p>	<p>This article speaks to the recognition that the future of work is during change with a “new normal” (Kulik, 2022, p. 217) evolving that will include a greater emphasis on a virtual workplace environment.</p> <p>The hybrid workplace is the new “way of working” (Evans, 2022, p. 48), a new operating model that requires leaders to learn how to “Navigate new ways of working” (Evans, 2022, p. 48).</p> <p>The “next normal acknowledges that life is dynamic, and whatever ‘normal’ looked like at the start of 2020 may be different” (Kulik, 2022, p. 217) in a post-COVID-19 world.</p> <p>The hybrid workplace is the “new normal” (Roberts &amp; Brown, 2019, p. 10).</p> <p>According to de Lucas Ancillo et al. the workplace “revolution initiated by COVID-19” (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021, p. 2302).</p>	<p><b>Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:</b> Participant 12 spoke emotionally about a personal experience related to the benefits of the hybrid workplace being the new normal because it allows her the flexibility to “take my daughter to ballet,” further admitting what came across as a happy emotional tone that “in the old days would be very difficult.”</p> <p><b>Non-Verbal, Facial Expression, and Explicit Description Observation:</b> Participant 3 gave a big smile when speaking about the hybrid workplace model becoming the new normal, sharing her opinion in a very confident and matter-of-fact tone, explaining that being a flexible workplace is critical for remaining competitive in the attraction of knowledge workers and one of the first questions prospective employees ask when being interviewed. “...it’s important for recruitment because it is the first thing people say to you... ‘what’s the deal here about in the office?’ And it’s the first thing that I’m prepared to answer. So, yes, I think flexibility is key” (Participant 3).</p>

	remote. I don't think that will also happen" (Participant 12).		
<b>Theme 2:</b> Adapting to a Transformative and Dynamic Individualized Hybrid Workplace Model	<p>When asked if hybrid will remain, Participant 4 said, "I think that it's hard to swing back to where we were...I think it will remain; I'm unsure where we landed...I don't think this is the final stop," acknowledging the hybrid workplace model continues to evolve.</p> <p>When discussing the hybrid workplace model as an evolving operating model Participant 4 said "I think we kind of swung the pendulum in one direction of flexibility, and then we tried to swing it a little bit back to try to create normalcy in our business. And we landed on a hybrid solution where our official policy is that we want staff to be in the office the majority of the week, and majority to us means three or more days."</p> <p>When discussing adopting the hybrid workplace model still in transition, Participant 1 said, "Absolutely. Candidly, I would say leadership is really trying to model the right behavior. I could work from home most of the time, but I'm probably in offices 3 days a week on average just because I want to show them that I feel it's important</p>	<p>The hybrid workplace model is recognized as a new normal that is continuing to evolve, enabling leaders to "re-imagine, re-improve, and re-invent the workplace" (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021, p. 2308)</p> <p>"A one-size-fits-all approach to returning to work doesn't exist" (Wyld, 2022, p. 14).</p> <p>Scholars have identified the transition to a hybrid workplace model a more flexible operating structure as the "evolution of the workplace" (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021, p. 2297); and "the future workplace has to be more digital, less hierarchical and more flexible, complying with the health, safety and technological conditions required by the evolution of pandemics, such as COVID-19" (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021, p. 2305).</p> <p>When it comes to the structure of hybrid workplace models "no one-sized-fits-all hybrid model" (Vidhyaa &amp; Ravichandran, 2022).</p> <p>"One-size-does-not-fit-all when going hybrid" (Hacker et al., 2020, p. 14).</p>	<p><b>Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:</b> Participant 17 spoke in a prideful, emotional tone about how her organization had a team that cared deeply about supporting the individual needs of their employees and clients, providing an example of one initiative that was created to help better support the individual stakeholders with a "COVID-19 playbook." Participant 17 said in a very excited tone, that the playbook offered guidance while still allowing employees to "think about what works for your family, think about what works for your team, think about what works for your client, and then think about what works for your own progression" at an individual level.</p> <p><b>Emotional Verbal Expression and Metaphor Observation:</b> Participant 13 spoke with emotion and in an empathic tone when speaking about how each employee has a different struggle and how offering support must be an approach specific to their individual needs, also using the metaphor of the "cookie cutter" with respect to explaining how one approach to structuring a hybrid workplace model for all companies or departments within a single company is simply not possible.</p>

to be here. I'm not mandating it.”  
Participant 1 said “I think the perfect example there is truly knowing your team because what...The nice thing now in this model is it's not a one-size-fits-all.”

According to Participant 13, “people are struggling, leaders are struggling because there's just so many diverse needs. And that's the whole thing is if we're trying to cookie cutter things and put these policies in place that applied to everyone in here, I'm a policy developer and program developer. How do you really create fairness and equity? Well, if one size does not really fit all...”

**Theme 17:**  
The Benefits of Taking an Individualized Leadership Approach Compatible with the Complex and Flexible Nature of the Hybrid Workplace Models

“If you talk about the idea of maturing how we move into hybrid, you go from roles and mandates and days to understanding that humans behave differently and have different needs and roles of different needs” (Participant 8).

“I think there's some benefits to that in any model, regardless of whether or not it's hybrid because you always have to start with the employee and their skillset” (Participant 2).

“The role of virtual leaders in managing the transition to the hybrid model becomes paramount” (Zachariah et al., 2022, p. 7).

“Increased difficulty in mapping team members need for support, as they were no longer being able to observe the teams in the office” (Semsøy, 2022, p. 12).

Pozen and Kochan (2022) identified is the recognition that “leaders must be aware of the potential unfair balance between those employees who can work from anywhere verse those who

**Emotional Verbal**

**Expression Observation:**

Participant 6 spoke with emotion and passion when she said “I'm seeing people get more intentional about their own happiness. And that means different things for different people. So, for some people, it means career growth, and for some people it means like a level of balance, it means engagement in other activities that they find fulfilling.”

**Body Language and Explicit Description**

**Observation:** Participant 18's body language when speaking about the importance of applying a

“...it was like a transitioning myself, but then making sure my people and the people who reported to me were okay, and I would say different people had different needs, and so while I personally was not specifically affected by young children, there were people on my team who were...”  
(Participant 6).

must remain consistently in-office, onsite, and the potential for feelings of inequality, jealousy, and resentment towards those employees who have the benefit of increased flexibility” (Pozen & Kochan, 2022, p. 2).

Developed by two scholars, Dr. Paul Hersey and Dr. Kenneth Blanchard, in 1969 (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020), at the core of Situational Leadership® style is the belief that the leader has the responsibility to adapt his or her “leadership style to the developmental stage of his or her subordinates follower development level” (Hakim et al., 2021, p. 139).

“Situations differ, and the most appropriate leadership qualities and actions vary from situation to situation” (Claus, 2021, p. 163).

Situational Leadership® style and more specifically adapting your leadership style to the individual needs of each employee was engaging as she maintained eye contact, looking directly into the camera on the computer and leaning it appearing highly engaged. Participant 18 appeared happy to be speaking about the importance of this leadership style since at times she laughed a little, confirming the importance of this approach while saying “I do [laughter] absolutely, I do...you always need to be aware of someone’s, skillsets and what works best for them.”

**Theme 18:**  
The Benefits of Being an Adaptable Leadership Approach During Times of Change and Uncertainty

Participant 3 recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic created a significant amount of change not only within the organization, but within employees lives that leaders must be aware of when it comes to adapting to their needs for flexibility for example. Participant 3 said “It has been nine months and many employees have in some cases moved away from the office, adopted dogs, among many other changes taking

Pertaining to the transition to flexible operating structures, organizations are dealing with “Uncertainty about the future of work” (Newbold et al., 2022, p. 18).

“Employers must make their expectations clear and seek the views of their employees on their expectations” (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 15).

During the COVID-19 pandemic and transitioning to a flexible operating structure “companies with

**Emotional Verbal Expression, Body Language, and Explicit Description Observation:**

Participant 3 changed emotional tone to that of surprise and frustration, and her body language shifted to one of increased engagement with her moving her arms more frequently when she spoke about need to be a resilient and adaptive leader while leading many generational X employees. Participant 3 said with a high level of emotion in her tone of voice “Innovation happens without us even

place between the 6th month and the 1 year time frame during the COVID-19 pandemic when people got lax, started getting second jobs, benefited from making more money at home due to reductions in commuting and childcare expenses in some cases, all of that kind of stuff that involved changing their lives.” Participant 3 provided this example in the context of also recognizing leaderships styles must adapt to this new reality, for example she discussed struggles with encouraging employees to return to the office and need for greater understanding in the employee’s perspective when creating strategies for encouraging more employees to return to the office more frequently.

“There are absolutely benefits to applying situational leadership style in a hybrid workplace model, but it's exhausting. It's hard. But it, I can, I see people that have a very it's like, here's my style, here's, and it doesn't work for everybody, right? So, I think it's like trying to, it's no different from relationship management with clients. Like every client has a different need and every team member is at a different

a high degree of digitalization were able to carry out this change process faster and more efficiently as compared to non-digitalized businesses” (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021, p. 2306).

“Our research suggests that unexpected crises can create a gender gap in work outcomes when none existed previously. Given that the Covid-19 pandemic is unlikely to be resolved in the near future, the gender gaps that we identified are likely to persist. Even after the pandemic, if organizations adopt widespread work-from-home policies, such gender gaps might continue to persist. More broadly, decades-long trends toward gender equality in the workplace might be reversed due to these changes. Our research suggests that management researchers and practitioners need to pay careful attention to this issue” (Feng & Savani, 2020, p. 729).

“In today’s volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous business environments, building resilient virtual teams is of paramount importance” (Kirkman & Stoverink, 2021, p. 11).

noticing. And that is like your bench lab work. One of the issues they had with the younger generation who's never been to work before because they just graduated at COVID, was that they would set up their experiment for half an hour and go home.”

### **Emotional Verbal Expression and Body Language Observation:**

Participant 7’s body language involved her leaning into the camera on the computer, increasing the use of her hands and nodding her head while speaking positively about the importance of “knowing what your direct report needs, if they need a directive manager, or if they just need someone who’s there to support them, is critical,” in addition to the change that is taking place at the time. Participant 7 displayed a very empathic and understanding tone when she spoke about leading a team during uncertain times, such as the most recent COVID-19 pandemic, she said “I manage every single direct report different because I have some direct reports that are highly capable and have been doing this job for a long time and are close to being promoted. And those employees I’m going to treat very differently from employees who are right out of school and really struggling, just like get a grip on like their daily work and things are falling through the cracks.”

stage in their career and needs different things. In the hybrid environment, it adds another layer of complexity because it's like, is 3 days a week in the office, good for them or not good for them? Is hybrid good for them or not good for them? Do you need to push them to come in a little bit more? Because you can see how their performance improves when they're in the office. So yeah, it just, it layers on the importance of situational leadership" (Participant 10).

"I think the major modification is as I already mentioned on the lower performers this is where like the major modification had to happen, because you can't see your employee every day, how do you make sure they are not struggling? How do you make sure you're best supporting them? That is the major modification I have had to make to my leadership style" (Participant 7).

**Theme 19:**  
The Benefits of Empowering Employees and Cultivating Trust in a Hybrid Workplace Model

"I really think that figuring out how to bring people together in a meaningful way when they're in person and then kind of translate that to online, not always jumping into a team meeting, like right away, like you have to have connection. How

"HR practitioners need to resist organizational pressures to closely monitor remote workers and limit their autonomy" (Kulik, 2022, p. 219).

Instead leaders should be "developing evaluation systems that are based on tangible performance

**Body Language**

**Observation:** Participant 13 smiled and was very focused on the interview discussions, particularly when discussing the importance of establishing a level connection and trust among teams operating in a hybrid workplace model.

do you get to know each other and really build that relationship and build the trust?” (Participant 13).

“I think leaders are still looking for some sort of quick fix to how they can adapt to leading in a hybrid workplace... They are searching for the 10 things they should be doing as a hybrid leader... I think people are over-thinking how different this operating model is... what we need to do is focus on humanizing the workplace more. For example, if you are having a bad day as a leader, that’s okay. Just tell your team, I’m disheveled right now, and I am sorry, or whatever you feel comfortable saying. Right. That kind of vulnerability builds so much more trust than any sort of leadership framework would” (Participant 11).

“We had this is the set meeting for production meetings, here’s the set meeting for this. It was much more regimented pre-COVID. And, but it was still very and I’m talking about my management style, it was it was still very base centered on personal relationships, knowing your team, trusting, they trust you, you trust them. Open transparent

indicators” (Kulik, 2022, p. 120).

Pozen and Samuel (2022) also recognize the need for organizations to shift from a “focus on outcomes, not hours” (Pozen & Samuel, 2021, p. vii) by measuring the results verse only measuring the inputs (Pozen & Kochan, 2022, p. 2).

One challenge for leaders involves “team leads now had to trust their teams more than ever, which was necessary for the success factor of hybrid work” (Semsøy, 2022, p. 58).

“Due to the new working conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, some employees may feel that their psychological contract may have been breached involuntarily” (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020, p. 914).

In a hybrid workplace model it is important to “create a supportive environment, ensuring structured communication with employees, regular check-ins, continuous clarification of goals, quick decision-making and building employer–employee trust” (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 15).

### **Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:**

Participant 16 smiled and spoke passionately about her leadership style involving empower empowerment based upon a foundation of trust. Participant 16 described her approach to Situational Leadership® as being “a manager that I want people to be trustworthy. When I very first work with anybody, I would say, I can’t help you if you don’t tell me what your problems are. I really don’t want to hear about you running around complaining to a whole bunch of people about something because if you need help, I can’t help you if I don’t know what the problem is. I’d rather you be honest and come and tell me what the problem is and then I can help with that.”

<p><b>Theme 20:</b> The Benefits of Consistent and Transparent Communication in a Hybrid Workplace Model</p>	<p>conversations” (Participant 1).</p>		
	<p>“I’ve always had an open-door policy. So, my team does tend to speak to me more often than I do have one-on-ones with all team members, whereas some of my colleagues only have certain team members” (Participant 2).</p>	<p>“Ensuring team members have psychological safety involves individuals meeting with one another for smaller interdependent tasks; and meeting with every newcomer individually to have a private, less intimidating space for them to ask any questions or concerns” (Reyes et al., 2021, p. 2).</p>	<p><b>Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:</b> Participant 10 spoke with a sense of being resolute when talking about the importance of communicating in-person, saying “Zoom is the default right now...people keep defaulting to virtual meetings.” Participant 10 openly shared her belief that it is more challenging to build a network remotely, saying in a questionable tone “You cannot build your network virtually, not really, right? You can get all the LinkedIn connections you want, but you can't build it virtually, but you never will.”</p>
	<p>When discussing communication in a hybrid workplace model Participant 2 described her communication with the team she is leading as being “very transparent, I think would be the word that I’d use. I would still say I have an open-door policy, meaning that the open door means, you want me in your office, you need to spend one-on-one time in person, let’s book it, we’ll make it happen” (Participant 2).</p>	<p>“Manager–employee relationship: when workers shift from working at the office to teleworking, it unavoidably changes the recurrence and nature of communications they once had with their managers and colleagues. Consequently, teleworking decreases face-to-face communications, which might affect getting prompt feedback on assignments from managers, and hence, could possibly and negatively affect the nature of the manager–employee relationship” (Diab-Bahman &amp; Al-Enzi, 2020, p. 912).</p>	<p><b>Emotional Verbal Expression Observation and Explicit Description Observation:</b> Participant 17 demonstrated the emotion of approval and agreement when speaking about the importance of individuals having their cameras on when conducting meetings remotely to achieve transparent communication and stronger engagement. Participant 17 provided an explicit example of how leaders play a role in establishing the norm when it comes to setting communication standards simply by leading by example. Participant 17 offered an example by saying “our CEO even if no one has their camera on, he will put it on and then it shames us, and we all put it on. He wants to see your</p>
	<p>“I would say that I have more meetings because there’s less informal touch base. So, I have one-on-ones with everybody once a week. I have a one-on-one or no I have a formal team meeting every Tuesday. So, it has actually gotten more intentional” (Participant 3).</p>	<p>“Communication among different parties (e.g., coworkers, supervisors, employers), which is critical to keep the remote workers productive, might be impaired as communication during the pandemic usually comes in one form: virtual and is limited by personal, organizational, and technological” (Awada et al., 2021, p. 1174).</p>	
	<p>“I think a lot of it is just about communicating and then I think video is amazing, so for us, video is always on, it is</p>		

not an option, unless your video is broken, it is always on, because you need to be able to still see facial reactions and you need to be able to engage on a human level, and so I think it's just being really thoughtful about how we use virtual tools and which ones work for what, and making sure that if we are taking shortcuts, we're not losing what is important along the way" (Participant 6).

**Theme 21:**  
The Benefits of Team Engagement and Collaboration in the Hybrid Workplace Model

"It's not something that we speak about, but I understand the concept. I think that when you work for organizations that are quite large, it's hard to feel like you are working towards a common goal or interest or feel that your part of the culture. Like for us, the words we use is, how are we able to bring the culture of our office and our organization to staff in a more meaningful way? And I think part of that is tough and that is a tough aspect to replicate over a hybrid work solution. Because to us, culture is created in an office environment, right?" (Participant 4).

Participant 1 believes hybrid leads must recognize the increase of multitasking when employees are working from home and the potential for decreased engagement. For

"Communication provides work resilience by sustaining the usual work operations and is key to mitigating the undesired effects of the sudden shift to working from home" (Awada et al., 2021, p. 1174).

"Challenge with not having face-to-face communication during hybrid meetings where some employees are in person" (Semsøy, 2022, p. 7).

"Members of virtual teams are not able to check in with each other and their leader as efficiently as they would if they were co-located. Thus, virtual team members stand a greater chance of experiencing ambiguity about their work roles. When workers are uncertain about which tasks, they are meant to complete (known as role ambiguity) or feel as though they are expected to perform duties that conflict with their other responsibilities (known as role conflict), they are likely to experience stress. Their attitudes towards their team and performance will suffer accordingly. Leaders should be sure to clarify what each member's work role is and what is expected of them" (Kozlowski et al., 2021, p. 5).

"Teleworkers who depend on other employees during teamwork may encounter

face, and I think that is what's kind of been very helpful."

**Emotional Verbal Expression Observation:** Participant 5 spoke with a sense of optimism and introspection when speaking about collaboration being possible in a remote environment. Participant 5 said, "I think the fact that collaboration only happens in person is a myth." Participant 5 continues to explain that although collaboration and engagement is possible in a virtual environment, she spoke with passion about the importance of still having in-person collaboration opportunities particularly for young professionals. Participant 5 said, "I think for people that are just starting out in their career where you learn by osmosis. I know I learned so much by just having people around me and listening to conversations and hearing what some of the struggles were hearing what some of their challenges were. But even in my former boss he, I would hear the way that he

example, when conducting lengthy meetings over Zoom with her team, “I’ve got people off camera, I know people are multitasking we don’t have that high level of engagement. If we’re bringing people together for an extended period, I’ll want to do that in person” (Participant 1).

According to Participant 8 the vibe in the room is better in-person, but employees in her experience need to be bribed to return to the office. According to Participant 8, “First of all, the vibe is so much better in-person, the energy and people say they see it. But even with that, we did a town hall when I started as the new general manager and we had to bribe employees with sweatshirts to come into the office and still half the people did not come,” an important consideration when leveraging Situational Leadership® style to encouraging greater levels of in-person team collaboration and engagement.

**Theme 22:**  
The Benefits of a Continuous Learning, Skills Development, and Growth Mindset in the Hybrid Workplace Model

“So that transition was kind of learning some new skills, different ways to manage people and having the patience to understand that we are all dealing with heightened levels of stress, anxiety, a lot of children and spouses

time pressure and might demonstrate a reduced level of individual productivity due to working in different locations” (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020, p. 912).

“Making team members feel connected to the team and the organization it is important to continue to have one-on-one calls that are not just related to tasks, based on individual needs; and create, engage, and encourage fun, non-work-related virtual events (e.g., virtual happy hour) to uplift those who are feeling isolated” (Reyes et al., 2021, p. 2).

“Employees stop coming to the office when it is not required” (Semsøy, 2022, p. 29).

“Employee–employee relationship: coordination, adaptability and workload among colleagues will unquestionably change as employees begin to telework. Other changes include lack of feedback, friendship and communication between employees (Fonner and Roloff, 2010).

Challenges with hybrid include struggles with “designing appropriate policies, infrastructure, structure, processes, etc., to facilitate employee engagement in the new workplace era” (Zachariah et al., 2022, p. 6).

would talk to people, whether it’s consultants, clients or whoever.”

**Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:**

Participant 18 demonstrated the emotions of joy and introspection when reflecting on the value strong team engagement and support provided to her and other leaders within her organization during COVID-19 pandemic during a time that were stressful and uncertain. Participant 18 openly shared a personal experience related to benefiting from team engagement explaining how she appreciated it most explaining how “as a leader specifically it was tough because we were going through the same anxiousness, not knowing what to expect, but then we had that added pressure of trying to keep a calm and happy face.”

**Emotional Verbal Expression Observation:** Participant 1 explained in a very contemplative tone how important having a growth mindset as a leader in a hybrid workplace model, acknowledging the growth that occurred within her team by saying, “I think

and/or partners and whatever it is in your working space. It was an experience” (Participant 1).

“I think there’s some benefits to that in any model, regardless of whether or not it’s hybrid because you always have to start with the employee and their skillset” (Participant 2).

Participant 11 adapted their training to reflect flexible operating structures, specifically how to better read non-verbal communications when operating remotely and focuses on training employees to be more empathetic and intuitive (Participant 11). “There’s also something about that intuitive aspect of just, there are no rules anymore really and old school, outdated leadership frameworks and styles are just, they’re just kind of contrived” (Participant 11).

Participant 13 spoke about the importance of employees learning “new skills on how to bring stronger interpersonal connections in a virtual environment,” and how to work well together while collaborating in a hybrid model.

“I think there’s been progress, but I believe

“I have developed some soft skills, such as communication skills and teamwork skills, and my attitude to work has improved. I’m simply loving working remotely because there is more room for prioritization and critical thinking and forsaking the “always ‘on’ culture, which is counterproductive for me” (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 10).

“Employers must reconsider their expectations for managing remote workers and take their remote working requests and desirable working conditions seriously even post-COVID-19. They must also update their digital technologies to enhance remote working experiences. Employers must become more aware that some employees working remotely spend longer hours at work with fewer breaks; hence, they must encourage employees to take breaks between work activities and employ various strategies to implement this practice, e.g. demonstrating care by leading by example, making breaks part of the culture, providing break-friendly apps and other wellness options. Remote workers must also implement strategies that foster remote working effectiveness and fulfil organizational expectations, including greater work responsibility and accountability; the

we’ve all evolved in our skill sets.”

### **Emotional Verbal Expression and Explicit Description Observation:**

Participant 14 spoke with a sense of purpose and pride in helping others grow and develop their skills in the new hybrid workplace model, sharing a personal example of how she encouraged a someone in her company to continuously learn and grow. Participant 14 said “Even though she reports to me, I keep like telling her, try to get experiences in all these other areas of the business...If you put yourself out there and you're visible in all these other areas and offices and departments, there's, I think a greater chance that for the females specifically, I think, to move up in the firm, because I think that was maybe a challenging area for females in the past, was really to get that visibility on their work and their skills.”

that there's still a lot more work to do because even in MBA programs and other management programs, they're not necessarily teaching really good communication skills, listening skills, or empathy" (Participant 13).

"We changed our training to reflect our operating policies, training employees how to understand intentional and nonintentional verbal cues or bodily cues in a remote environment, because you can't see the whole body" (Participant 11).

acquisition of soft skills; collaborative work; independent working; and social networking, to improve workplace communication" (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 15).

The critical competencies include "the ability to trust; build team orientation and integration; effective communication; personal characteristics; goal direction; providing constant feedback; operational coordinating and conflict resolution ability; technology skills/knowledge; awareness; quality decision making; monitoring change in environmental conditions; and reliability" (Maduka et al., 2018, pp. 700-703).

**Theme 23:**  
The Benefits of Embracing Authenticity, Intuition, and Intentionality When Leading in a Hybrid Workplace Model

Participant 17 believes in the need for a Situational Leadership® approach to leadership in a hybrid workplace model. "I think situational leadership style is what we need. I don't think there's one way to address everybody. And I think that is very much a reality today, like in this post pandemic world where we're trying to figure out what is the right move? I heard an HR consultant in the United States present a model that showed what we used to value and what we value today. And what we value today is humanization. It's not command and control anymore, but

"Leaders must be intentional as they convey relevant information about normative expectations and appropriate behaviors and develop a positive team culture remotely. During the team's initial interactions, leaders should model appropriate actions and desired behaviors" (Kozlowski et al., 2021, p. 5).

"44% felt working from home allowed them to be more authentic" (Ratican et al., 2021, p. 64).

"The crisis leader must fulfill two roles: to participate in authentic human actions and to convey in-situational messages. In terms of authenticity, a leader

**Emotional Verbal Expression Observation:**

Participant 5 spoke passionately about the importance of being your authentic self as a female leader and not shying away from leveraging your female traits, by saying "When I see female leaders exhibiting inherently masculine traits of eat what you kill, it's just not necessary...I think we're moving more towards community and seeing how that works, because the old system is, you know, all of the old ways of doing things are, it doesn't serve us anymore. So, I think that's probably from a leadership style is, I don't have to be the loudest person in the room anymore."

it's having input and having a voice and feeling valued. And things like benefits have gone through a revolution also...I think we must look at that humanization and how we interact with people when they're having issues in their lives" (Participant 17).

"I think one thing I would add is, like women I think, have sort of women's intuition, you would say, and I think women should really lean into that. I think sometimes, as I said, a lot of female leaders, my generation and prior, really kind of had to act more like a man to get where they were and sort of shut off any women's intuition, those kinds of things, and not allow some of the emotional aspects of being a woman to come into play. But I think through the pandemic we realized the women leaders, I think, were more able to lean into that intuition and really see where people were struggling and really see where some of the issues were, especially with other female employees. And I think we just need to continue to do that, like not let that go. As the pandemic is now fading away, I think we still need to lean into that intuition and that emotional side of us that is just as important as

should use comforting language and assume the role of a counselor to help individuals understand the crisis and reassure them about the future" (Urhan, 2023, p. 30).

"Research has revealed that the most essential skills in 2021 are adaptability, collaboration, creativity, emotional intelligence, and persuasion. Among them, emotional intelligence; self-awareness, self-management, social skills, empathy, and motivation emerged as a very important skill that is part of this category" (Urhan, 2023, p. 27).

"Soft skills are essential skills that are desired in all professions and business areas today, whose importance is increasing day by day and are known as 21st-century skills and are reshaped with digitalization and automation" (Urhan, 2023, p. 24).

"Without doubt, the changing context due to COVID-19 provided the structural break that was the impetus for a significant management paradigm shift needed for the 4th Industrial Revolution" (Claus, 2021, p. 162).

### **Emotional Verbal**

#### **Expression Observation:**

Participant 5 also shared a deeply personal perspective on herself, explaining in a very introspective tone "I also found I can't separate who I am from what I do, who I am is an extension of what I do. I just happened to find a job and lucky enough to get into leadership, and fortunate enough to be surrounded by a leadership team who accepts me as who I am, but I'm also very transparent that I am the least thing from perfect. I am an absolute train wreck most days, and I'm okay with that."

### **Emotional Verbal**

#### **Expression and Explicit**

#### **Description Observation:**

Participant 3 spoke purposefully and with a high level of engagement about the importance of being authentically yourself and intentional as a leader in a hybrid workplace model. Participant 3 provided a personal example of her being intentional in her actions while also self-advocating, explaining a situation where she intentionally had a conversation with a decision-maker who she knew would be hiring for a new position that would represent a promotional opportunity for Participant 3. Providing an example of what Participant 3 describes as an "intentional conversation," she explains with excitement how she acted with intention reaching out directly to the decision-maker saying, "I'm not sure

the logical side. And I think the two together really makes more of a well-rounded leader” (Participant 14).

Empathy in leadership is important in a hybrid workplace model, situational leaders as they are “able to see the world through someone else’s lens, I think is what makes me a great designer, but also a good leader in that sense as well” (Participant 4).

“But I think through the pandemic we realized the women leaders, I think, were more able to lean into that intuition and really see where people were struggling and really see where some of the issues were, especially with other female employees. And I think we just need to continue to do that, like not let that go. As the pandemic is now fading away, I think we still need to lean into that intuition and that emotional side of us that is just as important as the logical side. And I think the two together really makes more of a well-rounded leader” (Participant 14).

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if you have someone in mind for this opportunity but I would like to chat about it...we had a lovely 15-minute chat about my career aspirations...I now have a chat scheduled with the vice president next week to discuss this opportunity.”