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Master in Business Administration

Postgraduate Dissertation

**The role of Emotional Intelligence in Enhancing
Communication, Bonding, and Effectiveness in Hybrid IT
Teams: Bridging Post-COVID Collaboration Gaps.**

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Patras, Greece, February 2026

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The role of Emotional Intelligence in Enhancing Communication,
Bonding, and Effectiveness in Hybrid IT Teams: Bridging Post-
COVID Collaboration Gaps

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Dedication:

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and friends for their unwavering support,
encouragement, and patience throughout this journey.

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Special thanks to my supervisor, Mrs. Anastasia Constantelou for her valuable help and
guidance in order to carry out this research.

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered how IT teams operate. Many IT teams have adopted a hybrid or remote working model post-pandemic. While these work models can have various benefits, they also present challenges regarding communication, collaboration, and leadership. In this respect, having high Emotional Intelligence (EI) can enhance the ability of virtual teams to work together effectively.

This dissertation aims to explore how EI impacts communication, team-building, and overall effectiveness in hybrid and remote IT teams. Empirical data were collected using ten semi-structured interviews of IT professionals currently working within hybrid or remote IT teams, and the data were analysed thematically.

This research offers several suggestions for improving team performance, developing leadership, and implementing HR policies in a changing work environment.

Keywords

Emotional Intelligence (EI), Hybrid Work, Remote Teams, IT Teams, Team Communication, Virtual Leadership

Ο ρόλος της Συναισθηματικής Νοημοσύνης στην ενίσχυση της επικοινωνίας, του δεσίματος και της αποτελεσματικότητας σε υβριδικές ομάδες Πληροφορικής: Γεφυρώνοντας τα συνεργατικά κενά στη μετά-COVID εποχή.

Ελευθερία Αρετή Μαρίνου

Περίληψη

Η πανδημία COVID-19 έχει αλλάξει σημαντικά τον τρόπο με τον οποίο εργάζονται οι ομάδες Πληροφορικής (IT). Μετά την πανδημία, πολλές ομάδες δουλεύουν υβριδικά ή εξ αποστάσεως. Αν και αυτό το μοντέλο παρέχει πολλά πλεονεκτήματα, έχει επίσης δημιουργήσει κάποιες προκλήσεις στην επικοινωνία, τη συνεργασία και την ηγεσία. Σε αυτό το πλαίσιο, η Συναισθηματική Νοημοσύνη (Emotional Intelligence, EI) μπορεί να υποστηρίξει μια πιο αποτελεσματική συνεργασία σε εικονικές ομάδες.

Αυτή η διατριβή μελετά το ρόλο της EI σε υβριδικές και εξ αποστάσεως ομάδες, εστιάζοντας στο πώς η επικοινωνία, το δέσιμο της ομάδας και γενικότερα την αποτελεσματικότητα κάτω από την επιρροή της Συναισθηματικής Νοημοσύνης. Η εμπειρική διερεύνηση βασίστηκε σε δέκα ημι-δομημένες συνεντεύξεις με επαγγελματίες που εργάζονται σε υβριδικά/ απομακρυσμένα IT περιβάλλοντα και αναλύθηκε με θεματική ανάλυση.

Η συμβολή της παρούσας μελέτης εντοπίζεται στις πρακτικές της προτάσεις για την απόδοση της ομάδας, την ανάπτυξη της ηγεσίας και τις διαδικασίες Ανθρώπινου Δυναμικού (HR) στο δυναμικό εργασιακό περιβάλλον.

Λέξεις – Κλειδιά:

Συναισθηματική Νοημοσύνη (EI), Υβριδική Εργασία, Εξ Αποστάσεως Ομάδες, Ομάδες IT, Επικοινωνία Ομάδας, Εικονική Ηγεσία

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List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DSU	Daily Stand Up (meeting)
EI	Emotional Intelligence
HR	Human Resources
IT	Information Technology
P01-P10	Participant codes (anonymised identifiers)
RQ	Research Question(s)
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
EN	English (interview language)
Jira	Jira (issue tracking / project management tool)
Slack	Slack (messaging platform)
Microsoft Teams	Microsoft Teams (collaboration platform)

1. Introduction

In this chapter, a description of the environment in which the study was conducted is given and describes how workers have experienced a transition to hybrid and remote work since the onset of Covid-19, and the challenges that have arisen for IT teams due to variation in working with others. A discussion of how the digitally mediated nature of interactions can impact aspects such as quality of communication, trust, psychological security, and the cohesiveness of individuals within teams is also provided. The chapter ends with a description of the purpose, objectives, and research questions of this dissertation and a brief indication of the overall structure of this document.

1.1 Description of the Phenomenon (Hybrid Work, challenges faced by IT Teams)

Changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted many parts of day-to-day living, especially how businesses operate within their industries, significantly effecting change in software applications and infrastructures. As well as shifting all collaboration to virtual settings (with new tools, platforms, and practices), IT teams have also benefited from many new opportunities including working from anywhere without being physically present, increased work-life balance, and increased flexibility. Despite the great benefits, such as flexibility of working from anywhere without the need for physical presence, further freedom, and autonomy, it has also introduced some new challenges. Trust can become more fragile, and emotional disconnection due to the isolation, as well as the greater demand on leaders to maintain clarity, cohesion, and engagement at a distance.

Traditional methods for team collaboration typically require the team to work together from the same physical workspace. The use of a physical workspace creates spontaneous opportunities for interaction including both formal/informal conversations; meeting face-to-face; and direct contact. These spontaneous interactions provide a basis for developing emotional connections among teammates and create an emotionally safe environment where team members can communicate openly. Additional implications of hybrid working models are that teammates miss out on the daily routine of seeing one another, therefore, they don't have routine opportunities for interaction in digital environments. Communication becomes

much more scheduled, time regulated, and task oriented in comparison to those performed in person therefore a significant impact will be placed, not only upon individuals communicating, but also on how they communicate as an entire team, ultimately impacting upon their level of cohesion as a team.

To summarise this shift, Figure 1.1 provides a simple timeline of how work practices moved from co-located routines to remote work during COVID-19 and to hybrid norms. It also highlights the key collaboration changes that frame the problem addressed in this dissertation.

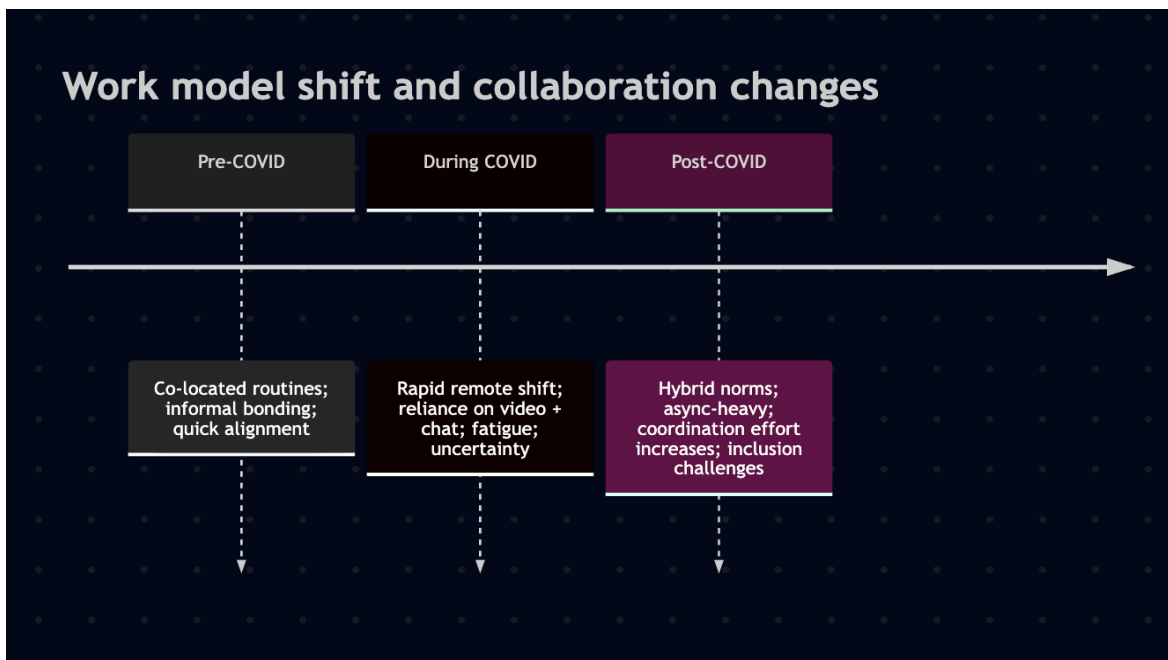


Figure 1: Work model shift and collaboration changes.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Digital communications tools (chat, email, video calls), which offer fewer unplanned social and emotional cues, as well as serendipitous micro moments to establish alignment among team members, have significantly mediated collaboration in the hybrid and remote IT teams. As a result, teams are having a persistent challenge coordinating work effectively and delivering products, while at the same time fostering an environment of trust, psychological security, and overall feelings of connection.

This dissertation focuses on how Emotional Intelligence (EI), or the ability to recognize, adapt to, communicate, and control one's emotions and actions, will likely be an essential

factor in achieving success as organizations move to hybrid and virtual work environments due to these structural changes within the workplace.

According to Pitšugina (2024, p.1), EI provides strong support for collaboration and leadership through the use of digital channels in performing work.

1.2 Purpose, objectives, and research questions

1.2.1 Research Purpose

The objective of this dissertation is to examine the influence of emotional intelligence behaviours (EI) on quality of communication, building teams, and the effectiveness of teams working in a hybrid or remote environment, particularly IT teams since COVID-19. As the use of digital communication tools for collaboration and teamwork increases, evidenced by the shift to a more electronic environment, the majority of teamwork occurs through written communication and/or asynchronous communication, with minimal use of non-verbal communication and fewer spontaneous interactions. All of these aspects contribute to the need to better understand the dynamics of virtual work.

In this context, the study examines the socio-emotional dynamics of virtual teamwork and explores how EI behaviours (interpreting tone and intent; empathic signalling; emotion regulation; relationship management) function in practice to support day-to-day collaborative efforts. Through semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis, the dissertation will explore participants' lived experiences of hybrid/remote work and identify routines and practices that may serve to decrease collaboration gaps, increase cohesion, and support team function in distributed settings. In so doing, the study seeks to provide insight into the ways in which structural barriers (such as digital mediation and reduced informal contact) relate to relational outcomes (such as trust, psychological security, and bonding) that impact collaboration in IT teams.

1.2.2 Research questions

This research project will examine the use of emotional intelligence to aid in team development within IT teams through the perspective of how they stay connected while working collaboratively together online through the use of digital technologies. Therefore, the following research queries will focus on how teams deal with challenges relating to

remote hybrid work environments, as well as how they are able to maintain trust, psychological security, cohesion, and performance through collaborative processes.

We studied the following questions:

- **RQ1:** How do remote and hybrid work arrangements affect IT teams' cooperation, communication, and trust?

The first research question looks at how remote and hybrid arrangements affect the general climate of trust and communication in IT teams in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the wider context in which virtual collaboration occurs.

RQ2: What particular actions and exchanges are required to establish a supportive, emotionally connected, and sympathetic virtual collaboration environment?

This research question is intended to build upon RQ1 by providing an understanding of the types of behaviours (micro level) and patterns or methods of interacting that are required for effective virtual collaboration (repairing miscommunication; expressing empathy; adhering to communication protocol).

- **RQ3:** How does Emotional Intelligence contribute to team performance, cohesion, and overall effectiveness for Teams Working Remotely?

Lastly, RQ3 addresses the connection from the Emotional Intelligence aspect of how the behaviours above lead to larger outcomes and events that are realised over time to build Collaborative outcomes (e.g., Cohesion, Psychological security, Reliability, and Accomplishing things together).

Through a series of observational behavioral insights, this research seeks to develop an understanding of Emotional Intelligence through the lens of observable behaviours rather than measuring it as a psychometric score. As part of a more robust understanding of Emotional Intelligence, these insights will enable IT managers, HR managers, and distributed teams to explore both theoretical and practical opportunities for improving collaboration in hybrid working environments.

1.3 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework where we define the Emotional Intelligence (EI) and the dimensions that this has, along with the leadership aspect when it comes to teams that collaborate virtually.

Chapter 3 focuses on the research methodology, including the case study design, the population and the sample. This qualitative study has been implemented through semi-structured interviews and was analysed using thematic analysis for data analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the interviews through themes that capture the participants' experiences of hybrid/remote work. This chapter highlights the communication, trust, leadership and team bonding in a way that participants have expressed them.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to the literature, comparing the outcomes with previous studies and research.

Finally, **Chapter 6** summarises the key conclusions and provides recommendations for IT leadership, HR practices and presents the limitations of the current study as a suggestion for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter builds a conceptual foundation for the exploration of how virtual collaborative behaviour via hybrid/remote collaboration technologies impacts daily team processes within an IT environment, while also establishing the relationship of emotional intelligence to the hybrid/remote context. The literature that makes up this foundation consists of three pertinent areas: emotional intelligence as behaviourally-based competencies in the workplace, leadership in virtual/hybrid team settings, and digitally mediated collaborative/communication technologies. Together these areas create the theoretical framework used to examine and interpret the interview data in this research. The chapter has three objectives. First, it describes the hybrid/remote collaborative context that was established as part of the research study, which corresponds with research question one regarding how hybrid/remote work and digitally mediated communication impact collaboration through communication-based variables (e.g., communication and trust) and psychologically safe work environments. Second, the chapter defines the micro-level behaviours and interaction patterns (e.g., exhibiting empathy, establishing connection, and creating a supportive working environment) utilized by team members to maintain an empathetic, connected, and supported working environment when doing collaborative work virtually or remotely, thus responding to research question two. Finally, the three areas of literature are integrated to explain how behaviours related to emotional intelligence and leadership operate as practical mechanisms affecting the broader collaborative outcomes of the team (e.g., teamwork and team performance) that are influenced by the hybrid/remote context, answering research question three.

2.1 Definition and dimensions of Emotional Intelligence (EI)

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) was introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990), who defined EI as “... the ability to perceive emotions, to use them to enhance thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to manage emotions so as to promote personal growth” (Duncan, 2007, p. 2). Their ideas provided a foundation from which Goleman (1998) built on for a more workplace-oriented view of EI. He articulated that team dynamics and leadership are greatly influenced by the environment of the

organisation. Therefore, EI can be assessed based on two general domains of competence, intrapersonal and interpersonal, that each have various components that affect the way one behaves in a team setting.

Intrapersonal competence is related to how well a person understands themselves emotionally. They include self-awareness (the ability to identify and understand emotions, values, and the reasons for behaving), self-regulation (managing emotional input from outside oneself and reacting appropriately), and self-motivation (continuing to be actively engaged with oneself and having the motivation to do so based on self-awareness and self-regulation) (Goleman, 1998). Interpersonal skills are related to how well a person relates to others. Interpersonal skills include both relationship management (demonstrating good relationship-building and relationship-maintaining skills) and social skills (such as assisting someone else with their development; resolving conflicts; and contributing to the development of teamwork that is functional and cohesive) (Goleman, 1998).

Emotional intelligence is manifested in how people behave under extreme stress, in their communication, and when dealing with challenges while collaborating. This is of special concern with hybrid and remote work settings where most day-to-day interactions are done electronically rather than in person, therefore making it more difficult to interpret social-emotional cues or any signs of emotional expression. In software development, emotional intelligence (EI) is critical because collaboration requires frequent written communication and changing requirements and this increases the need to have awareness of one's emotions, regulate emotions, and manage the relationships between team members. There is also evidence to suggest that EI patterns may be different when comparing remote to on-site working environments, and those differences could be a result of variations in the level of coordination among team members as well as the complexity of tasks being performed (Madampe, et al., 2024). Lastly, emotions also play an important part in the software field and there is evidence that shows that developers' emotional states have a strong correlation with perceived levels of productivity, reinforcing the need to create a positive emotional environment among team members (Weichbroth et al., 2025, p. 1).

2.1.1 Working definitions for hybrid/remote collaboration

Hybrid work is a work arrangement where employees have an established pattern of working in-person at the office and remotely. The way hybrid work occurs can vary from

team to team, depending on how frequently they meet in person, how different locations work together to complete tasks, and how synchronous and asynchronous communication is distributed between members. Remote work describes when most of the work is performed away from the employer's physical location and depends on the use of I.C.T.s to coordinate and work with team members at a distance (Allen et al., 2015). For the purpose of this dissertation, remote work will refer to working a large percentage of the time at a distance and hybrid will indicate an ongoing transfer between in-person to distance work.

Digital collaboration (or digitally mediated work) is teamwork that is done using digital communication and coordination technologies (e.g., chat systems, email, video meetings, task/ticketing systems). Communications conducted using tools are limited in the different types of cues they can add to the interactive experience (Daft & Lengel, 1986). This can create confusion due to the lack of visual and other social context, especially when the communications are complex or involve heightened emotional sensitivity.

Collaboration challenges in our research are instances when teams working together to complete interdependent tasks experience recurring conflicts due to limited shared context, and limited opportunity to spend informal time together for alignment purposes. Examples of these challenges include ambiguity in tone and intent; reduced shared understanding; breakdowns in coordination as a result of mismatched tools and timing; and a sense of exclusion and/or isolation due to the level of transactional nature of interacting with each other. We consider collaboration gaps to be situational results of distance and the means of mediation creating a need for teams to manage through explicit communication norms, repair practices, and relational maintenance (Olson & Olson, 2000). For clarity, the key concepts used in this dissertation are summarised in Table 1.

Leadership Challenge	EI Behaviour
Lack of physical presence	Proactive communication and regular check-ins
Miscommunication and ambiguity	Clear, empathetic, and structured messaging
Employee isolation	Emotional support and inclusion practices
Lack of trust	Consistency, transparency, and reliability

Unequal participation (remote vs office)	Inclusive communication and equal involvement
--	---

Table 1: Definitions of hybrid work, remote work, and digital collaboration.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Allen et al. (2015) and Daft and Lengel (1986).

2.1.2 Definitions and conceptual approaches to EI

In, Emotional Intelligence (EI) is defined variously throughout literature with three major approaches being the ability model, trait EI, and mixed models. The ability model uses the cognitive-emotional abilities that allow individuals to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions positively (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Trait EI describes an individual's self-perceived emotional dispositions or traits, for example, the way they respond/act out emotions, through self-reported measures that are highly correlated with their personality; whereas mixed models view EI more broadly in terms of competencies and observable behaviours that are relevant anywhere but especially in the workplace (Goleman, 1998) including but are not being limited to: self-awareness; self-regulation; empathy; and social skills and other related dispositions.

While the various approaches to emotional intelligence (EI) have some commonalities, they vary in determining how to conceptualize emotional intelligence (EI); that is to say, the extent to which each approach defines EI as either (i) cognitive ability, (ii) personality trait, or (iii) an amalgam of broader competencies, meaning that the range of implications for studying and understanding EI will vary depending on the way in which EI is conceptualized. With this in mind, the mixed approach to EI is well-suited for qualitative interview research because it concretises EI into observable behaviours/relational practices in the workplace that participants can reference as examples of daily collaborative activity such as (a) emotion regulation under duress, (b) signalling empathy, and/or (c) relationship management. Thus, similar to the study's focus on practices rather than fixed traits (or "scores") for measuring behaviours or relational practices of EI, this study treats EI within the context of this dissertation as a collection of intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviours that are enacted through interaction as opposed to a collection of discrete, fixed traits or measures of EI, especially through the context of digital communications.

2.1.3 EI dimensions used in this dissertation

This dissertation will examine how EI supports the workspace following Goleman's framework, as Emotional Intelligence observes behaviours that affect collaboration directly. The dimensions that are used to analyse the findings through the literature review are self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and social skills.

These dimensions are used as an analytic lens to interpret communication clarity, emotional disconnection, leadership behaviours, and bonding processes in hybrid/remote IT teamwork.

Table 2 presents a summary of key EI dimensions, and how each EI dimension is expressed behaviourally in hybrid work environments.

EI Dimension	Description	Example in Hybrid IT Teams
Self-awareness	Understanding one's emotions and reactions	Recognising frustration during asynchronous communication
Self-regulation	Managing emotional responses appropriately	Pausing before responding to unclear or tense messages
Empathy	Understanding others' emotions and perspectives	Checking in on colleagues and interpreting tone carefully
Social skills	Managing relationships and interactions effectively	Resolving misunderstandings and maintaining team cohesion

Table 2: Emotional Intelligence dimensions and behavioural examples in hybrid teams

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Goleman (1998).

2.1.4 EI as an interpretive lens for hybrid IT teamwork

Virtual teamwork is based mainly on tools such as chats, calls and tickets. Thus, the tone and emotional signals are easier to miss. EI becomes particularly relevant, not as an extra, but as a tool that keeps collaboration human and effective at a distance.

In this dissertation, EI is used as an interpretive lens to explain why the quality of communication is more important to quantity, how trust and supportive team culture can be protected and enhanced online and thirdly, how leaders can shape a sound climate for further closeness.

2.2 Leadership in Virtual Teams

Working virtually within IT teams requires a change to traditional leadership. Leaders are no longer physically present in an office with the rest of their team. The interaction with the team is primarily through channels and messages. This reduces the spontaneous moments and face-to-face interaction that used to exist in the traditional model. As such, leaders and managers need to adjust the way they manage, connect, and communicate.

Remote collaboration relies on new tools that include asynchronous collaboration and scheduled meetings. This model comes with new challenges for leaders in building trust, safe environment and a shared sense of purpose, especially because all these are harder to maintain in distance.

According to Goleman, leaders with EI have the ability to:

- Notice emotional signals even when team members are online.
- Having empathy, especially when team members are isolated.
- Adjust tone, clarity and level of details that the individual needs.
- Create inclusion and an environment that feels safe even when people work remotely (Goleman, 1998, p.317).

Leadership in virtual teams is less visible in the room and more visible in routines. It is about building relationships, making things clear, addressing issues and blockers and verifying everyone is aligned with the team's purpose. When leaders have emotional intelligence as a tool, then they can establish easier team cohesion and motivation, and avoid the feeling of emotional disconnection, (Dhawan & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2018, p.4).

In hybrid IT teams, building a safe place means that emotional well-being is a priority over the results (de Souza Santos & Ralph, 2022, p.10), (Lather & Kaur, 2023, p.6).

2.2.1 Leadership challenges in virtual/hybrid contexts

Leaders in hybrid work face additional challenges as they do not interact with team members in the same physical space. Instead of leading through presence, they have to lead through virtual meetings, chats and emails (Olson & Olson, 2000; Dhawan & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2018). This can create a few challenges.

First of all, keeping everyone aligned means that they have to share the information with everyone without leaving anyone behind. It is important to verify that everyone is included in the same conversation and decisions (de Souza Santos & Ralph, 2022). Secondly, they should be proactive and have in mind that maybe there are people who hesitate to ask questions especially when the emotional signals are not visible (Edmondson, 1999; Goleman, 1998). Thirdly, they have to help new joiners adapt smoothly to the team and avoid the real risk of disconnection and lack of belonging (Dhawan & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2018; de Souza Santos et al., 2023).

Finally, there are team members who may work in the same office, while others are not present. That creates the need of making everyone included in decisions, conversations and opportunities that could appear (de Souza Santos & Ralph, 2022; Uggla, 2024).

2.2.2 EI and leadership behaviours

EI is highly relevant to leadership. The way that leaders behave establishes the way that a team works. Collaboration and communication within a team are not just about tasks. People need to feel that they belong to a safe environment in order to be efficient and productive. Leaders are responsible for making this possible, to make people feel safe to speak up, to communicate clearly and remain connected despite asynchronous communication and distance.

Prior research suggests that leaders with high EI support clear communication, reduce misunderstandings and create safe routines that make individuals feel connected and safe. Overall, EI is treated as a capability that is crucial in virtual setups because emotional meaning is easier to miss and harder to rebuild. Table 3 summarises key leadership

challenges in hybrid environments and the corresponding EI-related behaviours required to address them.

Leadership Challenge	EI Behaviour
Lack of physical presence	Proactive communication and regular check-ins
Miscommunication and ambiguity	Clear, empathetic, and structured messaging
Employee isolation	Emotional support and inclusion practices
Lack of trust	Consistency, transparency, and reliability
Unequal participation (remote vs office)	Inclusive communication and equal involvement

Table 3: Leadership challenges in hybrid teams and corresponding EI behaviours.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Goleman (1998), Dhawan and Chamorro-Premuzic (2018), and Edmondson (1999).

2.3 Team collaboration, bonding and communication in hybrid settings

In the traditional way of working, which implies that most team members are located at the same office, team members frequently share spontaneous moments, have coffee breaks together, have lunch, and engage in informal conversations. Nowadays, though most IT team members work separately from each other or even in different time zones. Thus, communication has become mainly scheduled, time-boxed, and task-oriented. In most cases, the interaction is primarily written and recorded, which also means that there are second thoughts when it comes to spontaneity. Apart from the spontaneity, the elements of the daily interaction have become significantly fewer, where people are unable to “read the room” and sense the atmosphere.

2.3.1 Communication in digitally mediated work

Remote/hybrid teams use digital communication tools (such as Microsoft Teams, Slack, ticketing systems like JIRA, and document management systems) to capture and record all

communications and interactions. This provides team members and others who need to know about the interactions of the teams with a permanent record of their communications. At the same time, it reduces the degree of connection among team members compared with when they communicate face-to-face (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Olson & Olson, 2000).

Digitally mediated work can also encourage a more transactional mode of communication. As messages work as a way of updating and making decisions, the language that is being used becomes narrower as everything is focused on tasks' implementation and accomplishment, like "Can you do X?", "Y is blocking me", "When can we deliver this?". Over time, this can reduce the informal exchange and relational connection to a mainly written and asynchronous one (Olson & Olson, 2000; de Souza Santos & Ralph, 2022).

Effective distribution of virtual teams requires the use of Agile techniques (Somanathan, 2023) as an Emotional Intelligence (EI) resource to allow for messages to be interpreted from a limited number of cues, including observing small variations in nonverbal (e.g., silence, time delays, brief answers) or verbal forms of communication, and to assist teams in anticipating their reactions through proactive means to help manage changes in both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication (Somanathan, 2023; Daft & Lengel, 1986). This becomes even more crucial in technical fields, where the high degree of cooperation required, due to short project timelines and increased pressure on individuals, can give rise to misunderstandings that can eventually lead to tension and delays as they occur (Olson & Olson, 2000; de Souza Santos et al., 2023).

For example, this writing style allows for the efficiency and accountability that we experience in a virtual work environment; however, in order to increase the emotional intelligence we use and develop our repair systems to remove the robotic nature of how we communicate, we should also seek to enhance the EI we possess in day-to-day digital collaboration (Golema, 1998; Lather & Kaur, 2023).

2.3.2 Team bonding and reduced social presence

Team bonding refers to the emotional connection, trust and sense of belonging that team members feel within their team, and generally in the company. It is the relational layer that supports a smooth and comfortable interaction where individuals feel that they are in a safe space and can be themselves in a way that can be more productive during their collaboration.

In office settings, bonding means having casual conversations, sharing moments, and developing micro-interactions that make them feel that they belong in a team. In virtual settings, team bonding becomes more difficult to build. In addition, new joiners may struggle to integrate this emotional connection. As such, they may feel more that the quality of communication is more about task information exchange rather than being really close to each other or really visible as persons.

In practice, team bonding requires intentional relational exchange and shared experience. As such, bonding is highly related to EI- behaviours, such as empathy, appreciation and sharing concerns and support.

2.3.3 Digitally mediated communication and reduced cues

Most collaboration in hybrid/remote teams happens through electronically mediated methods (e.g. chat, e-mail, video meetings, task/ticketing systems). Each of these electronic methods is different and provides differing levels of 'richness', in terms of their ability to provide non-verbal and contextual/relationship cues. As electronic communication provides less social signalling, the amount of ambiguity also increases—especially in complex, sensitive, and high stakes transactional exchanges (i.e. Daft & Lengel, 1986). As such—as well as making it difficult to interpret tone and intent, producing misalignment, and requiring greater effort towards building shared understanding—less social signalling is likely to lead to differences in third-party perceptions of message content than if equivalent content was communicated in person.

Asynchronous communication (i.e. read and respond at different times) also plays a role in shaping the digital collaboration experience. Although asynchrony provides the benefit of flexibility, it also compromises immediate feedback and repair opportunities, which ultimately makes it more difficult to clarify a misunderstanding or modify a message based on someone else's response—given there will have likely been many days/weeks between the time when the original message was sent and the time when the recipient responds. Over time, the decrease in spontaneous interaction and informal alignment opportunities weakens the shared context; leading to ongoing coordination frictions—particularly in interdependent work environments (e.g. software development—Olson & Olson, 2000).

Because of these challenges, teams often use explicit norms and “repair behaviours” (e.g., clarifying intent, checking assumptions, signalling empathy, reframing tension, and

restoring connection after a misunderstanding) to maintain better collaboration in environments with low cues (Olson & Olson, 2000; Daft & Lengel, 1986). In this dissertation, these practices are analysed using an EI perspective because they contain aspects of emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and relationship management, all of which are exhibited through daily interactions (Goleman, 1998; Lather & Kaur, 2023). The main communication challenges arising from digitally mediated collaboration are summarised in Table 4, while Figure 2 provides a visual representation of these communication dynamics.

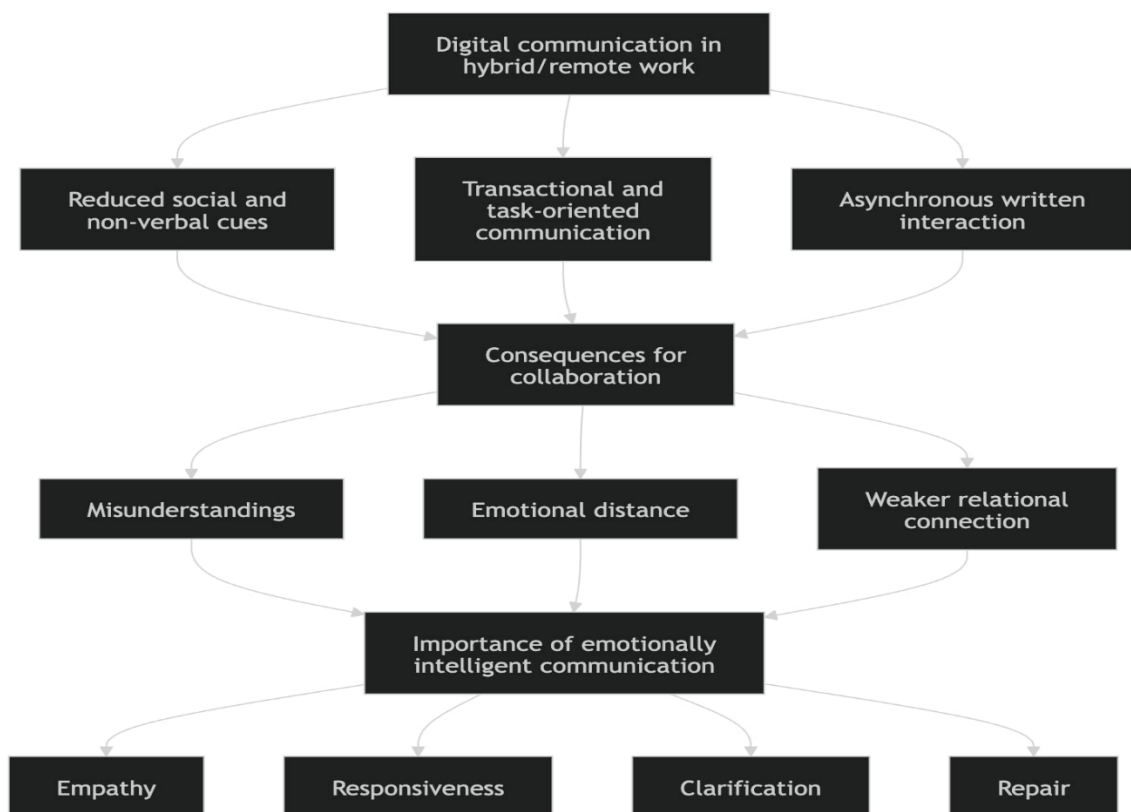


Figure 2: Communication dynamics in digitally mediated hybrid work.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Daft and Lengel (1986), Olson and Olson (2000), de Souza Santos and Ralph (2022), de Souza Santos et al. (2023), Goleman (1998), and Lather and Kaur (2023).

In decreasing the amount of visual cues that are present, an asynchronous form of communication, and a task-based way of interacting; these components contribute to a lack

of social understanding, emotional disconnection and less of a relational bond, which then require a higher level of emotionally intelligent modes of communicating.

Challenge	Description	EI-based Response
Reduced non-verbal cues	Lack of tone, facial expressions, body language	Active interpretation and clarification
Tone ambiguity	Messages misinterpreted emotionally	Empathy and careful wording
Asynchronous delays	Slow feedback and response gaps	Patience and proactive follow-up
Reduced shared context	Lack of informal alignment	Explicit communication and check-ins

Table 4: Communication challenges and EI-related responses in hybrid teams.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Daft and Lengel (1986) and Olson and Olson (2000).

2.3.4 Trust and psychological safety in virtual teams

In teamwork, trust and a supportive team climate are critical relational conditions to achieve effective teamwork regardless of whether the collaboration is digitally mediated or distributed. In a team-based context, trust is commonly defined as one person's willingness to place reliance on the actions and intentions of another under the interpersonal conditions of interdependence and uncertainty (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). When teamwork takes place in a hybrid/remote context, trust is often built through clear communication, responsiveness, reliability to complete work as promised, and presumed intent of others' words or brief digital exchanges (Olson & Olson, 2000; Edmondson, 1999). To illustrate how trust and psychological safety emerge in hybrid and digitally mediated environments, Figure 3 presents the key relational mechanisms and outcomes.

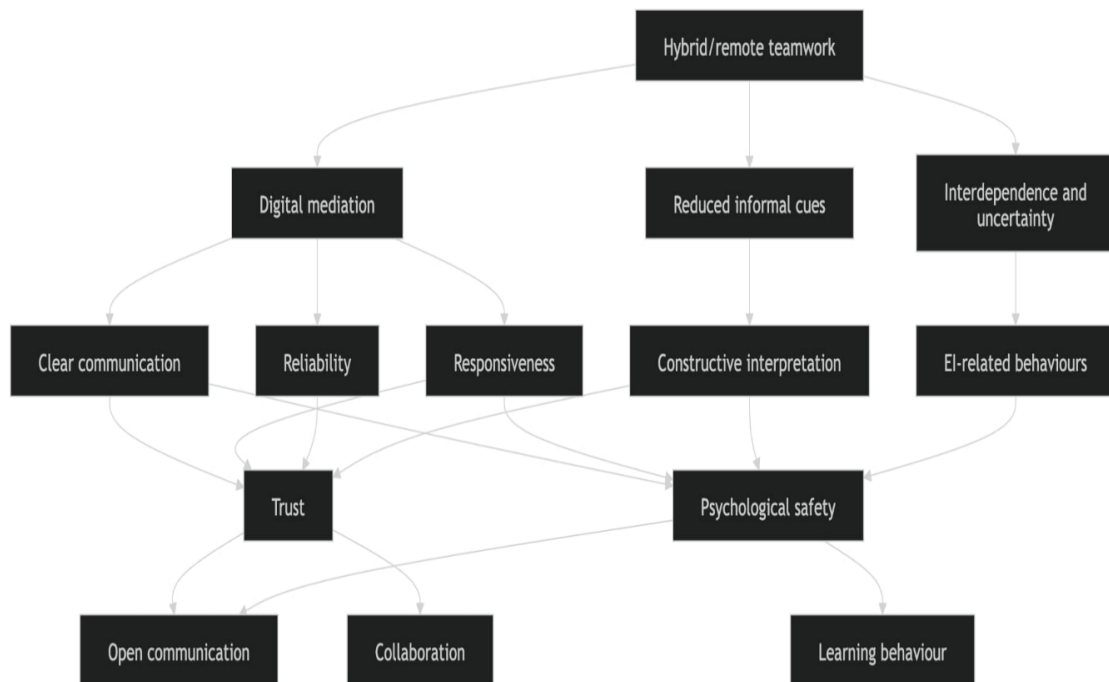


Figure 3: Trust and psychological safety in hybrid IT teamwork.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Daft and Lengel (1986), Olson and Olson (2000), Edmondson (1999), and Goleman (1998).

Psychological safety is defined as a shared belief that the team allows for safe interpersonal risk-taking—asking questions, acknowledging incorrectness, bringing up an issue of concern (Edmondson, 1999). When teams work together through digital channels (where informal social cues are typically limited and misunderstandings are likely to remain) psychological security is critical to maintaining open communication with one another and continuing to demonstrate behaviour that is oriented towards learning. Trust and psychological security are treated as primary intended outcomes that result from the combination of structural collaboration characteristics (e.g. digital medium or decreased informal interaction) and from behaviours associated with EI (e.g. empathy signalling, constructive feedback, emotional regulation and repair).

2.3.5 Coordination practices and collaboration gaps post-COVID

The way IT teams work together has changed since the COVID 19 pandemic and now they are reliant on more structured routines or processes where they have set stand-up meetings, sprint planning meetings or ticketing-based workflows. These routines help the

teams stay in alignment with their tasks that they need to deliver. However, when teams are focused strictly on delivering through these means, they can lose the feeling of being connected with one another as well as lose the sense of being part of something greater than themselves.

When individuals are primarily focused on just delivering, there are times where there will be collaboration gaps because the individuals do not have the same background information or context of the task being performed by others. Additionally, asynchronous communication for remote workers typically causes them not to feel included or like they belong to a safe or secure environment, which can influence levels of trust amongst individuals. This dissertation will investigate how emotionally intelligent skill sets and behaviours are integral to this relational work and that they will help to illustrate why teams are able to stay cohesive and work well together, while other teams experience difficulties with collaboration gaps.

In summary, the conceptual framework outlined in this dissertation sees hybrid/remote work contexts interfacing with various collaboration frictions and examines the role of EI-related behaviours as mechanisms that foster both relational and performance outcomes for virtual IT teams. The structure of this framework is described below.

- Contexts/Inputs (i.e., the physical space for hybrid/remote work): Hybrid/remote work arrangements; digitally mediated communication; lower number of informal interactions; increased asynchrony.
- Collaborative gaps: ambiguity regarding tone/intent; weakened shared context and informal alignment; coordination friction across tools/time; decreased feeling of inclusion and belonging.
- EI-related mechanisms (behaviours):
 - Self-awareness and self-regulation: e.g., managing feelings of tension, pausing before responding, and reframing message intent.
 - Empathy: e.g., taking another's perspective, checking-in on another, validating concerns, signalling support.
 - Social skills and relationship management: e.g., repairing damaged relationships, acknowledging and showing appreciation for others, establishing routines of inclusion, and managing conflict constructively.

- Outcomes: Effective communication; trust; sense of psychological security; cohesion; and perceived day-to-day effectiveness.

3. Research Methodology

This chapter presents the qualitative methodology through which the research questions will be answered. In addition to contributing to the overall understanding of the study, this chapter also serves to clarify the research design, rationale, sampling strategy, and data collection method (semi-structured interviews). In addition, it explains how themes were identified through qualitative analytic processes from the interview data, and describes the actions taken to demonstrate the credibility and quality of this research.

3.1 Research design: Qualitative exploratory Study

3.1.1 Rationale for case study approach

The case study qualitative design approach is chosen to study emotional intelligence (EI) for purposes such as communicating, collaborating, and bonding with team members in hybrid/remote IT teams for the purpose of establishing trust and team bonding in IT teams.

According to Taylor et al., 2023, a case study is an appropriate method for examining a contemporary social phenomenon in its real-world setting when the phenomenon cannot be distinctly separated from its setting (pp. 105-107). The dissertation will therefore examine EI related behaviours; trust; and the development of bonds through everyday interactions influenced by an organisation's routines; technology-enabled communications and leadership practices; and norms of collaboration can all be considered EI related behaviours.

Case studies are also suitable for gaining insight into the participants' experiences, perceptions, and emotional reactions in a particular context (Taylor et al., 2023, p. 28). This dissertation examines the "case" as how hybrid/remote collaboration in an IT team is being done at this time (after COVID has changed the way teams need to work). Instead of viewing the case as one organisation, this study views it as a bounded collaboration environment. This environment is characterised by: (a) teamwork across geographic locations; (b) reliance on digitally mediated means of communication; and (c) continuously needing to work together in order to complete an interdependent, shared task. The participants will share their perspectives about how collaboration is taking place in their various roles and modes of working, and will describe how behaviours related to EI either enhance or impede the quality of communication, trust and cohesion in day-to-day virtual collaboration.

In this context, the research plan serves the purpose of enabling both an in-depth exploration of hybrid/remote collaboration as it is experienced in practice (e.g., how communication is scheduled, how it is subject to time constraints, tools used to facilitate) and focuses on researching EI behaviors and patterns of interaction that emerge via real collaborative events (e.g., in response to pressure, clarification of a message's tone, dealing with conflicts and maintaining the connection via repairing misunderstandings).

3.1.2 Research setting and context

The research will investigate the experiences of those employed within IT teams during the post-COVID period. Most of the people in this sample will be employed either remotely (via telework) or via hybrid arrangements (at home and office). The participants work in various positions and have a broad range of roles related to digital collaborative work in the tech industry. Even though the majority of the participants in this study will come from different organisations, they will have some similarities regarding how they typically operate within a remote/hybrid environment. All of the participants will be active team members who collaborate primarily through the use of digital tools and processes, such as video conferencing, chat applications, and task/ticket management tools. Due to the fact that many of the team members will communicate with each other primarily in writing and within tight timelines, and because these digital tools will reduce opportunities for informal interaction and limiting chance socio-emotional cues, the context for examining EI-related behaviours in collaboration is particularly relevant.

In exploring the context of collaboration from the participants' perspectives, the study will also look at how they define communication, bonding, trust, and leadership within the structure of their daily work, and how they view EI-based behaviours as supporting (or impeding) collaboration. In doing so, this research setting provides a practical environment for addressing the study's three research questions, specifically understanding the conditions for collaboration (RQ1), understanding the micro-level behaviours that allow for empathy and connection (RQ2), and determining how EI-based behaviours impact the broader outcome of collaboration (RQ3).

3.2 Selecting IT professionals working in hybrid/remote teams

3.2.1 Sampling strategy and participant criteria

To find individuals with experience in fully remote or hybrid IT teams, I recruited people who (a) have experience in hybrid/remote teams over three years, (b) work in the IT sector with roles such as software engineers, data analysts, technological researchers and managers, and (c) collaborate with their teams via digital tools. I also sampled people who have a variety of seniority and work mode (remote and hybrid). Finally, all the above were found through professional networks.

A purposive sampling method was used to identify individuals with relevant experience working in hybrid/remote IT teams. The participants were screened for the following qualifications:

- Hybrid/Remote Experience — Candidates need to have three years' or more experience working on either hybrid teams or fully remote teams.
- Sector and Job Role — Candidates should be employed in the IT field such as but not limited to Software Engineers, Data/Analytic Experts, Technology Researchers, and Managers.
- Digital Collaboration — Candidates should use digital communication tools (e.g. chat, video conferencing, and ticket/task systems) to collaborate with colleagues on a regular basis.

To provide a clear overview of the sampling process and participant selection, Figure 4 illustrates the recruitment approach, screening criteria, and final sample composition.

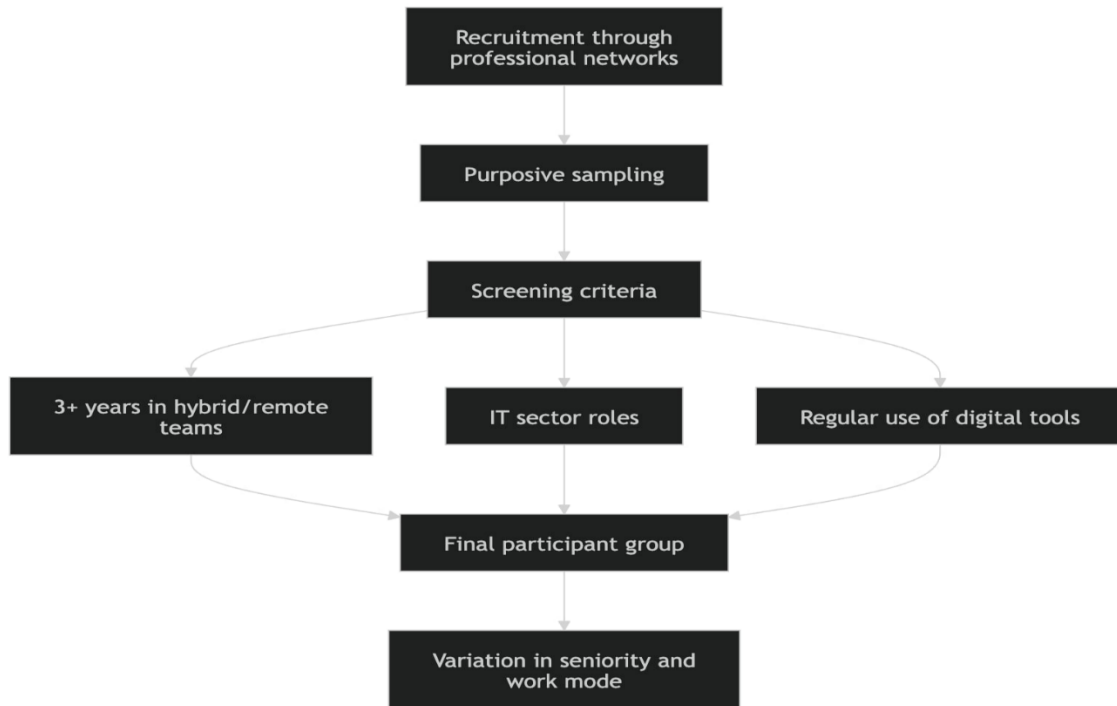


Figure 4: Sampling strategy and participant selection process.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The sample will consist of participants from varying seniority levels and modes of work (i.e. remote versus hybrid) to obtain a broad range of perspectives. Participants were recruited from professional networks. The goal was to obtain information-rich cases where the participants could provide direct insight into how communication and relationship building played out in distributed teams and to provide specific examples of collaboration challenges and EI practices.

3.2.2 Participant profile overview

The study included ten participants (P01-P10), representing a variety of IT roles, seniority, professional background, work mode and multi-perspective. Interviews were conducted in both English and Greek, and participants were also balanced in terms of gender (50% female and 50% male). Also, the below information is displayed through an anonymized IDs (P01-P10) to maintain confidentiality.

Overall, this diversity aims to capture various digital experiences to enrich the thematic analysis.

Code	Position	Work Mode	Duration (minutes)	Comments
P01	Senior Development Manager	Hybrid	60	25+ years of experience; 10 years in management; 5 years in hybrid setup
P02	Senior Software Manager	Remote	50	25+ years of experience; 10 years in management; 3 years in hybrid setup
P03	Full Stack Developer	Remote	50	Fully remote career; tech nomad
P04	Senior Software Engineer	Hybrid	40	
P05	Senior Principal Software Engineer	Hybrid	80	-
P06	Senior Software Engineer	Hybrid	60	
P07	Senior Software Engineer & Researcher	Hybrid	35	
P08	Data Analyst	Hybrid	35	Prior Associate Lead & Recruiter
P09	Data Engineer & Analytics	Hybrid	40	
P10	Data Analyst	Hybrid	30	

Table 1: Overview of participants' roles, work mode, and interview duration.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

3.3 Data collection: Semi-structured interviews

3.3.1 Interview protocol and procedure

Semi-structured interviews have been conducted to collect data from each of the participants. Semi-structured interviews provide a structure for the researcher and provide a format for each participant to speak freely about the topic area being investigated. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to provide a comparative depth of their experience, including specifics on their experience, examples of their experience, and how they interpret their experience. The researcher developed an "interview guide" to ensure that the data collected were usable for comparison across all participants (the data were gathered in accordance with the researcher's three research questions). The full interview protocol is provided in the Appendix. The interview questions were developed by the researcher based on the research questions and the literature review presented in Chapter 2. More specifically, the questions were designed to explore how emotional intelligence is reflected in communication, team bonding, leadership, collaboration and performance, as well as the challenges and strategies that exist in hybrid and remote work. Thus, the interview questions were grouped and organised into five thematic areas, which were as follows:

1. Emotional intelligence and communication
2. Team-building/cohesion
3. Leadership and emotional intelligence
4. Collaboration and performance
5. Challenges and strategies

The researchers conducted interviews between 30 and 80 minutes using Google Meet; the interviews were conducted in English or Greek. All interviews were recorded digitally (with permission of the respondents) and each respondent received a verbatim transcription of their recorded interview to aid in the analysis of their verbal responses. The verbatim transcriptions preserved the context and meaning of everything the respondent said during the interview, including all pauses, inflections and contexts in which all of the respondents spoke which provided accurate representations of the intended meanings behind everything

that was recorded during the interviews. As the interviews were conducted in both Greek and English the researcher took care during the preparation of each respondent's interview transcript to maintain the intended meaning from both languages throughout the research and reporting process. The researcher identified themes and created codes based on the manner in which the participants expressed their experiences as participants of the research.

3.3.2 Ethical considerations (consent, confidentiality, data handling)

Ethical considerations were addressed through informed consent, confidentiality and safeguarding confidential information. At the time of conducting interviews, participants were provided with information regarding the purpose of the research, the nature of the research project, and their right to withdraw from the study at any point before being interviewed.

After consent was obtained to record interviews, transcripts of recorded interviews were created. To preserve the confidentiality of participants, transcripts were created which did not include any identifying information (i.e., no participant names, project names, or other personal identifiers). Each transcript only included a code (i.e., P01 - P10) so that it is possible to identify which transcript corresponds to which participant.

All audio recordings and transcripts stored by the researcher in a secure and locked location to which only the researcher will have access. All data will be used only by the researcher for the purposes of conducting research that is connected to an academic purpose.

3.4 Data analysis method (thematic analysis)

3.4.1 Analysis approach and theme development

Thematic Analysis of interview data was used to discover recurring patterns of meaning across participants' accounts. The analysis was conducted in stages. The first stage involved reviewing the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the data set. The second stage involved generating initial codes from the transcripts to identify meaningful features relevant to the research questions (e.g., evidence of breakdowns in communication, empathy, leadership behaviours, bonding experiences, and repair behaviours). The third stage involved looking for similarities among the codes across the transcripts in order to create related candidate themes. Candidate themes were then refined based on their internal

coherence (the degree of connection between the statements in the theme), their ability to be distinguished from other themes, and their support by multiple participants' accounts. Finally, representative excerpts were selected to demonstrate each of the identified themes within the results chapter.

Throughout the analysis process, the researcher paid attention to both the statements made by the participants, as well as to the implied meaning and assumptions underlying the participants' statements, particularly in relation to moment-to-moment emotional experiences (e.g., tension, miscommunication, belonging/not belonging, trust, and safety). This assisted in linking the participants' accounts to the EI framework that was developed within the theoretical framework.

3.4.2 Quality considerations (credibility)

In order to establish credibility, the researcher maintained a systematic record of coding decisions and how themes evolved through iteration. The development of themes was cross-participant and was substantiated using direct quotations to develop an explicit link from the data gathered through interpretation. The researcher purposely retained divergent opinions and cases that did not correspond with the dominant trend(s) to eliminate potential overgeneralisation. The intention was to ensure that the analysis presented complexity, not just all agreement.

The study included documentation to enhance analytic clarity; this was accomplished by recording the steps taken throughout the reflective analytic process and maintaining an identical method for applying both thematic codes and thematic designations across all interviews. The results served to provide a clear trail of decisions made by the researcher; therefore, increasing both the integrity and the dependability of the results

3.4.3 Reflexivity and researcher role

This research study views reflexivity as important due to the subjective nature of emotional intelligence and collaborative virtual work. The researcher recognises that previous involvement in remote IT work and may have an impact on interpretation of data collected from participants and how codes were assigned and prioritised in the analysis of themes.

To support reflexive practice, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal, recording initial impressions following interviews, potential biases, and emerging thoughts throughout the coding process. The researcher reviewed previous transcripts when coding to ascertain that later insights were not influencing what has been previously coded and that themes were reflective of pattern within the data set and not just meaningful/remembered examples only. Also, notes have been made of times when participants did not share the same views as the researcher; these instances have been used to develop the analysis further instead of forcing the data into an already developed assumption.

Reflexive practice strengthened the transparency in the analysis process and improved the credibility of the analysis; reflexive practice made visible decisions made in interpretation of qualitative data regarding themes in participants' experiences, allowing themes to be anchored in the experiences of participants instead of previously established researcher impressions.

4. Data Presentation & Analysis

In this chapter, the study's empirical results will be presented and an explanation of how the interview data was analysed will be provided. Ten semi-structured interviews with professionals currently working in the hybrid/remote IT workforce, will be used to analyse how Emotional Intelligence (EI) manifests in participants' daily collaboration behaviours. The chapter looks at all aspects of communication, tone and intent interpretation, connection maintenance, trust, and psychological security when digitally mediated interaction occurs between participants. Analysis of the data was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis, which involved systematic coding and the identification of patterns of shared meaning throughout the interview data. Following the presentation of an overview of the dataset and the analysis, eight thematic codes reflecting the central aspects of participants' experiences will be identified using representative quotes and descriptive commentary. In conclusion, a synthesis of the eight themes were the relational context between the codes and how EI-related behaviours may serve as a bridging mechanism between the structural conditions of hybrid work and relational outcomes such as cohesion, trust, and perceived day-to-day effectiveness.

4.1 Overview of the dataset and participants

This chapter reports the main findings from ten interviews with professionals working in hybrid and remote IT teams. The analysis focuses on how Emotional Intelligence (EI) is reflected in participants' day-to-day work. the way people communicate, connect, and work together when they are not always in the same physical space.

Participants represented different backgrounds, roles, and levels of experience, and offered rich perspectives on how hybrid work feels.

To analyse the data, I used reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021), looking for patterns that repeated across the conversations. The codes that came up were grouped into broader themes that reflect how people experience emotional and communication challenges in this kind of work environment.

Eight core themes emerged from the analysis:

1. Emotional Experience of Hybrid Work

2. Communication Transformation in Virtual Contexts
3. Task Orientation vs Human Connection
4. Emotional Intelligence as an Interpersonal Skill
5. Leadership Role in Emotional Climate
6. Psychological security & Trust Building
7. Team Bonding Mechanisms
8. Hybrid Work Structures & Practices

Each theme is presented below with:

- A brief description of its meaning
- A list of key thematic codes (normalised across participants)
- Selected verbatim quotes that illustrate the theme
- Interpretative commentary connecting the findings to relevant literature

This chapter focuses on presenting the data as authentically as possible, staying close to participants' voices while highlighting the underlying patterns of experience.

4.2 Presentation and analysis of interview responses

This section explains how the interviews have been carried out and analysed. The study is based on semi-structured interviews where the participants have IT roles and are working either remotely or hybrid. All interviews were conducted via video call, recorded with consent and transcribed for analysis.

To analyse the interviews, I used reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). I first familiarised myself with the dataset by reading both the interviews and the notes that I have kept during them. Then, I generated the initial codes based on the participants' responses. The final coding represents codes that have been grouped into broader patterns through repeated responses from interviews.

Findings are presented thematically. This format supports the findings across all the answers among the participants. Each theme, finally, are extracted which overlaps and interacts. For example, the reduced non-verbal cues and tone ambiguity (Theme 2) often connect to emotional distance (Theme 1), while leadership behaviour (Theme 5) shapes trust and psychological security (Theme 6). The next section represents the eight themes that emerged from the analysis.

4.3 Identification of key themes

This section presents the key themes that have been developed through the reflexive thematic analysis. Through this process, eight themes were generated to capture participants' experience in hybrid and remote setups and the role of EI in communication, connection, collaboration and leadership.

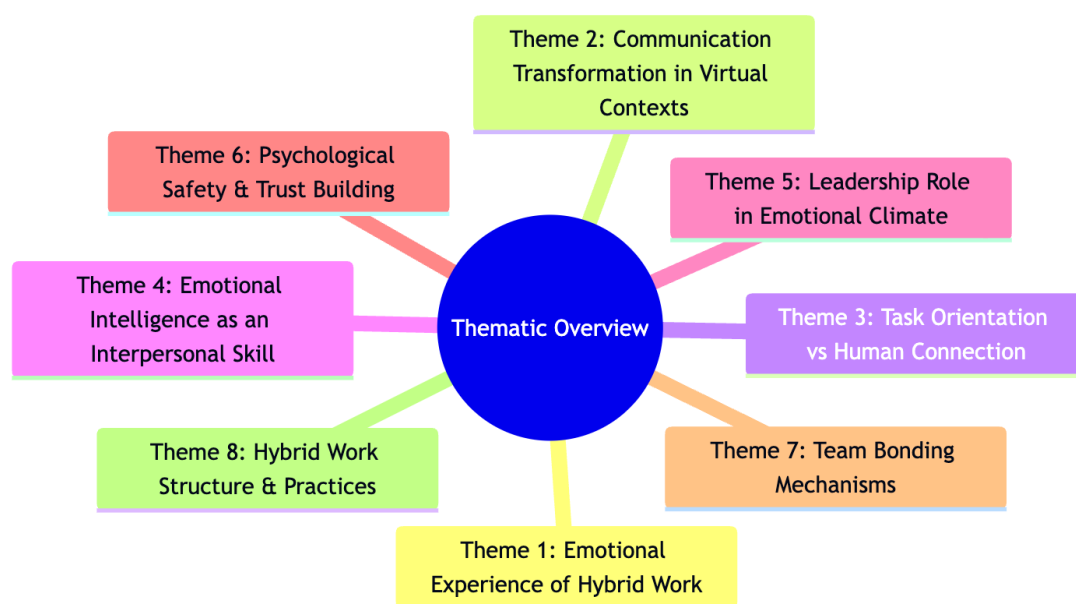


Figure 5: Mindmap of the eight themes.

Source: Author's own elaboration

4.3.1 Theme 1: Emotional Experience of Hybrid Work

Indicative meaning:

Several participants described remote work as emotionally distancing: despite the frequent meetings and messages that they exchange with the team, they often feel isolated, disengaged with their teams.

Thematic codes included:

- Emotional disconnection
- Emotional distance
- Reduced bonding
- Isolation
- Emotional fatigue
- Lack of emotional presence
- Disconnection despite frequent meetings

Representative Quotes:

- “There were people who joined during the period I was fully remote, and I never managed to build emotional bonding with them.” (P10)
- “The emotional connection I had with colleagues slowly faded... We kept having meetings, but it wasn’t the same.” (P06)
- “It’s not that we don’t talk. We talk a lot. But I still feel disconnected from the team sometimes.” (P02)
- “Sometimes I feel like I’m floating. You lose the informal connection, and your presence fades.” (P04)

Analysis & Interpretation:

Many participants expressed that they have felt emotionally disconnected while they work remotely. Even though there is frequent communication among the team members through meetings and chats, the communication does not seem the same. Spontaneous moments, casual chats, and lack of face-to-face do not exist anymore. That leads to weaker bonding, and the sense of isolation increases.

What Pitšugina (2024) found is that working remotely can create emotional gaps, and teams need to make a clear effort to bridge them. Emotional Intelligence helps to handle conflicts more efficiently and keep the team united.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Communication Transformation in Virtual Contexts

Indicative meaning:

Communication has shifted from in-person to virtual. That means that team members don't have many signs to interpret the meaning of a written message and the communication, due to a lack of body language, tone, and visual contact, often leads to misunderstandings and makes the interaction poorer.

Thematic codes included:

- Failure to communication
- Loss of non-verbal cues
- Tone ambiguity in written messages
- Reduced spontaneity
- Task-driven communication
- Lack of informal interaction

Representative Quotes:

- “Written messages can easily sound aggressive, even when that's not the intention, because you can't see the other person.” (P01)
- “You lose the small informal conversations. Most messages are just about tasks and deadlines.” (P08)
- “When communication is only through chat, it's harder to understand how someone really feels.” (P07)
- “We mainly communicate to get the job done. There is very little space for casual or spontaneous interaction.” (P03)

Analysis & Interpretation:

Participants highlighted that communication has become more difficult, as in many cases the message is not clear. Communication in person includes many different elements that support the whole attempt of interaction and make any request clear, such as body language, tone of the voice, and eye contact, which can add further information to the message that needs to be transferred. Now that communication is based mainly on virtual channels, interaction lacks the above elements and makes the message harder to understand. Messages are purely around tasks, with little sense of feelings. As a result, everything seems much

more official, distant, and with less chance for moments of truth connection. That also leads to weaker bonding across team members and more chances for misunderstanding and misinterpretations.

As Dhawan and Chamorro-Premuzic (2018) suggest, digital communication environments demand higher emotional awareness, as the lack of non-verbal signals makes emotional interpretation more difficult and fragile.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Task Orientation vs Human Connection

Indicative meaning:

Participants frequently reported that communication becomes mainly task-oriented. Meetings tend to focus strictly on deliverables and progress updates, leaving little space for informal exchange or personal interaction.

Thematic codes included:

- Task-focused meetings
- Productivity over emotion
- Efficiency vs depth
- “Just get on with it” mentality
- Emotional suppression
- Formalised interaction

Representative Quotes:

- "You do it in a very procedural way... 'you pay me to do this'..." (P02)
- “Stand-ups can become automated with bullet points, and it can be more effective, but it restrains communication.” (P06)
- “It keeps it 100% about work.” (P06)
- “Most of your messages can be ‘can you do this?’... no ‘hey, how are you?’”
“You just get on with the work.” (P07)
- “We’re entirely focused on the tasks... there’s no conscious effort to remember the human... It doesn’t feel like a true emotional connection... It’s just a thing you expect at 3 pm.” (P08)

- "Too many meetings destroy productivity." (P03)
- "It clipped my wings at that moment... 'okay, I have a task, and I'll do it.'" (P04)
- "Checkpoints can feel robotic and impersonal." (P10)

Analysis & Interpretation:

In most cases, participants as employees feel that interaction is focused just on the tasks, and that does not give space for human connection. This, most of the time, makes them feel like they are machines that produce a piece of code and disconnects them from the team and the feeling that they do matter.

This pattern reflects what Goleman (1998) has framed as the risk of "emotional minimisation" in environments that emphasise output. Emotional Intelligence in these contexts becomes essential not only for leaders but for all team members.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Emotional Intelligence as an Interpersonal Skill

Indicative meaning:

Participants described Emotional Intelligence as a crucial interpersonal skill in hybrid and remote teams. Empathy, emotional awareness, and respect for personal boundaries were seen as necessary to sustain collaboration and human connection when non-verbal cues are limited.

Thematic codes included:

- Empathy
- Emotional awareness
- Emotional availability
- Respect for personal boundaries
- Giving space and time
- Perspective-taking

Representative Quotes:

- "You have to try to understand how people feel... you don't see them in practice, so you need to ask." (P04)

- “You have to give people space sometimes. You don’t know what’s going on behind the screen.” (P02)
- “It’s important to respect that someone might want to stay more to themselves some days.” (P10)
- “You need to read between the lines. A written answer can sound aggressive even when it’s not.” (P01)
- “You have to be more mindful and adapt, because you don’t see the other person’s situation.” (P09)
- “Empathy becomes more deliberate in remote work. You don’t notice things unless you actively look for them.” (P07)

Analysis & Interpretation:

Across participants, it has been emphasised that EI is a soft skill which is not just a nice-to-have; it is essential. In hybrid environments, people need to understand more with fewer elements, less information. EI is the tool that could assist everyone in avoiding misunderstanding and misinterpretation, and give more space to others by providing patience and space.

This finding aligns with Goleman’s (1998) view of Emotional Intelligence as a set of learned capabilities that shape effective relationships. In hybrid teams, EI functions as a compensatory mechanism, replacing the emotional information that would otherwise be conveyed through physical co-presence.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Leadership Role in Emotional Climate

Indicative meaning:

Leaders play a crucial role within a team. Especially in hybrid and remote set-ups, they serve as a regulator for the good atmosphere in the team and the way the team performs. Having a bold presence and not avoiding emotional discussions assist team with the best way and prevents team disconnection and bad performance.

Thematic codes included:

- Emotionally intelligent leadership

- Emotional availability of leaders
- Handling emotional conversations
- Responsibility for team cohesion
- Reaction to stress and uncertainty
- Leadership response shaping trust

Representative Quotes:

- “In hybrid work, the manager is responsible for designing the team in a way that allows people to bond emotionally.” (P10)
- “He had a different expectation in his mind, but he didn’t communicate it... the way he reacted made us all feel like we failed.” (P10)
- “It matters if your manager gets it; when you're not at your best, they should lighten your load instead of pushing.” (P08)
- “Some leaders avoid emotional conversations. That creates distance.” (P06)
- “A manager who doesn't understand people will miss the emotional patterns in the team and act purely based on performance metrics.” (P02)
- “A good leader in remote work needs to deliberately create space for people to talk, not just about tasks, but about what’s going on.” (P01)

Analysis & Interpretation:

Participants consistently pointed to the leader’s role as critical, not only about tasks but also as the factor that develops and maintains the emotional dynamics within the teams.

Leaders who appear to have high Emotional Intelligence, where those who listen actively, offer emotional support, and create opportunities for bonding. When leaders avoided emotional topics, failed to set clear expectations, or focused exclusively on deliverables, participants reported frustration, misalignment, and emotional withdrawal.

This aligns with Goleman’s (1998) framework of resonant leadership, where leaders influence team performance by attuning to emotional undercurrents and modelling empathy and regulation. In hybrid contexts, this leadership quality becomes even more vital, as physical distance amplifies emotional ambiguity and the potential for disconnect.

4.3.6 Theme 6: Psychological Safety & Trust Building

Indicative meaning:

Trust and psychological safety are elements that do not exist by default in remote contexts. They require constant effort and a sense of active work. Participants highlighted the importance of consistency, openness, and fairness in fostering trust. Teams work better when members feel safe to ask questions, express vulnerability, and know that their contributions are valued.

Thematic codes included:

- Psychological safety
- Trust
- Freedom to ask questions
- Feeling supported
- Fairness
- Reliability

Representative Quotes:

- “If I can’t trust their work, I can’t have my name put next to that without checking everything.” (P06)
- “You have to earn people’s trust. And you can’t do that just by being friendly on Slack.” (P02)
- “If someone’s tone changes or they stop replying, I immediately think something is wrong.” (P08)
- “When you see fairness and reliability from your team and your manager, then it’s easier to ask for help or share concerns.” (P01)
- “Sometimes people don’t ask because they don’t feel safe, they think it’ll make them look stupid.” (P10)

Analysis & Interpretation:

In hybrid teams, trust and a supportive team climate do not exist by default. People should build a culture where people can have open dialogue, express their concerns, ask questions without hesitation and feel like a valuable member.

When there is no secure environment, people hold back, disengage, or enter "survival mode" in team interactions.

This is consistent with Edmondson's (1999) foundational research on psychological security, where trust, fairness, and a non-punitive environment support learning, openness, and team effectiveness. In remote or hybrid environments, leaders and peers must double their effort to communicate clearly, act with integrity, and create space for honest dialogue; otherwise, trust quickly erodes.

4.3.7 Theme 7: Team Bonding Mechanisms

Indicative meaning:

Team bonding comes through unstructured meetings, social moments, by having casual chats, shared frustrations, or celebrating achievements.

Thematic codes included:

- Informal interactions
- In-person office days
- Social time
- Celebrating success
- Shared struggles
- Peer collaboration

Representative Quotes:

- "After work drinks... remind me I'm part of the team." (P08)
- "Gossiping and bitching about a project is probably the biggest driver." (P07)
- "When we celebrate a release together, I feel closer to the team." (P05)
- "In DSUs or retros, we have little jokes, or someone says something personal, that's when you bond." (P01)

- “Peer-working and just having the mic open while working... feels like being in the office.” (P03)
- “Sometimes you don’t realise how much bonding comes from struggling through a hard sprint together.” (P04)

Analysis & Interpretation:

In hybrid work, team building depends more on informal interactions than organized activities. Participants were skeptical of formal team building and they said that the only way for teams to bond is through collaboration, empathy, and informal interactions.

This supports what is called “earned intimacy”. The idea that trust and connection in remote teams don’t happen automatically but need to be built through real, human moments. Teams that make time for casual chats, honest sharing, and even laughter tend to stay more connected and motivated.

4.3.8 Theme 8: Hybrid Work Structure & Practices

Indicative meaning:

Structural aspects of hybrid work indirectly shape emotional connection and inclusion. Several participants noted issues of exclusion when not co-located. At the same time, asynchronous communication and tool reliance (Slack, Teams, Jira) were visible as both empowering and alienating, depending on how they’re used.

Thematic codes included:

- Hybrid vs fully remote
- Async work
- Tool reliance (Teams, Slack)
- Lack of shared context
- Visibility and presence

Representative Quotes:

- “We work mostly without a camera... and I’ve gotten used to it, but for someone new, it can be a real problem.” (P06)
- “I think I’m the only remote one in my team... that isolates me a bit.” (P08)

- “We rely heavily on Jira and Kanban... it helps transparency, but it’s not the same as knowing what someone’s up to.” **(P10)**
- “If you’re not in the office, you miss out on the context. You don’t overhear things or pick up signals.” **(P05)**
- “Even if we’re in the same building, we just use Teams now... that’s how everything works.” **(P03)**
- “I like the hybrid model... but I wouldn’t want fixed days. I want the flexibility to decide.” **(P04)**

Analysis & Interpretation:

Participants expressed that working in hybrid setup is something that affects how they feel. Some individuals shared that when they are only person working remotely while others met in the office made them feel left out. Others mentioned that working at different times or relying only on tools to stay updated created emotional and informational distance.

A recent study, Madampe et al. (2024) describes that individuals should have an extra effort to stay in sync when not all are in the same place. Despite the flexibility that remote offers, people also have the need to feel seen, included, and part of a shared experience.

4.4 Cross-theme Synthesis

This sections brings together all the themes as they should be studied; all together, rather than exploring them separately. The change of way of working has influenced the way people communicate, feel, behave and connect with the rest of the team. Leadership and Emotional Intelligence, at the top, is the factor that shapes all the above, leading to different dynamics.

4.4.1 How themes relate

The eight themes in this dissertation describe different aspects of hybrid work, but they are all connected. These connections were identified during the analysis by comparing coded data across participants and how they described their experiences. In many cases, participants expressed similar feelings and described situations that have to deal with during their work experience. During the interviews, individuals expressed that they feel emotionally disconnected and many times isolated from the team, no matter how frequently

they interact with the team (Theme 1). The outcome of this is the way that communication changes in virtual contexts (Theme 2). When team members have non-verbal cues and become less active, communication gaps are easily created, and messages are more often misread and have emotional distance.

In most cases, communication has become task-oriented with non-spontaneous moments, as it used to be with the old traditional way, where everyone was in the office (Theme 3). Thus, the human layer is replaced with productivity and deliveries. This is where EI emerges as an important tool which is not just a nice-to-have (Theme 4).

Leaders play a pivotal role in connecting processes. Theme 5 appears to present the importance and the influence that they have in day-to-day interaction, along with the culture that they shape, which is the primary factor for an employee to feel psychologically safe (Theme 6). When this safety is established, then the team bonding is strong and can lead to a sound relationship where more informal moments can be shared, like small talks, celebrations and team supportiveness (Theme 7).

Finally, Theme 8 provides an insight into how tools, asynchronous work, camera and office attendance can support inclusion and bring everyone together. All the above are strongly related to EI qualities that act as key mechanisms.

Instead of being a causal sequence, these links are displayed as an interpretive summary of the connections between themes throughout the dataset, as seen in Figure 6.

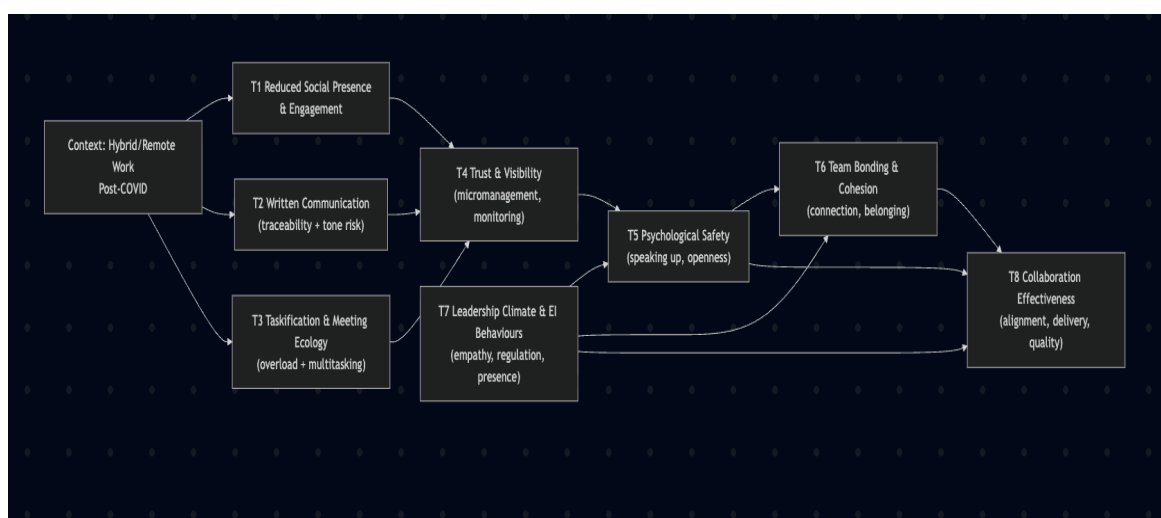


Figure 6: An interpretive summary of the connections between themes.

Source: Author's own elaboration

4.4.2 A conceptual link: EI as a bridge

Based on the qualitative findings, Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a key factor in teams' performance. In virtual environments, the emotional aspect can easily be lost and harder to rebuild. EI-related behaviours help in three ways:

- **Communication:** EI helps individuals to interpret messages, communicate and reduce conflicts (Themes 2 and 4).
- **Connections and safe environment:** EI make bonding, trust and openness much easier (Themes 5, 6 and 7).
- **Management of stressful situations:** Individuals that have empathy can help on shaping a stable environment that has clarity (Themes 3, 4 and 5).

Overall, the findings suggest that EI is shared across the team, not just among leaders and managers. Those in leadership roles shape the norms, routines and safe environment within the teams. Routines like frequent check-ins, saying thank you and recognising contributions, respecting boundaries (Themes 4 and 7) are elements that help teams to collaborate well in a virtual setting (Theme 8).

4.4.3 A Conceptual Synthesis Summary

The findings in this dissertation overall suggest that post-COVID hybrid IT teamwork can be understood as a system with two interconnected layers:

- Structural layer, which includes hybrid practices, tools and asynchronous work (Theme 8)
- Relational layer, which includes qualities in communication, connection, trust and leadership (Themes 1-7).

What connects the two layers of structural and relational is the Emotional Intelligence in teamwork. When EI is present in the working environment, trust stays strong, people connect more and problems are solved more easily.

This dissertation supports that gaps in IT hybrid teams can be handled more efficiently when relationships are robust and structured with empathy and good practices from the leadership side.

5. Discussion

In this chapter we will present the dissertation findings as they relate to the research questions set forth earlier; we will also situate our results within the wider literature concerning hybrid/remote collaboration, digitally mediated communication, and Emotional Intelligence (EI) at work in general. The chapter will interpret the structural conditions of hybrid/remote work (e.g., an increase in reliance upon digital channels, fewer informal contacts etc.) according to the results of the thematic analysis from Chapter Four, therefore highlighting how such conditions can impact on communication, connection, and collaborative behaviour amongst IT team members. Following this, the chapter will provide an overview of how the results compare and contrast with those obtained in other related research, and will highlight key areas where the findings of the current study both converge with and extend the existing body of knowledge, focusing on the mechanisms through which behaviours associated with EI positively impact relational outcomes including; trust, psychological security, cohesion and perceived day-to-day effectiveness.

5.1 Link to the literature

The overall results of this research support many of the findings in previously published studies on hybrid/remote teamwork and emotional intelligence (EI). In particular, the participants' descriptions of emotional distance and diminished emotional connection (Theme 1) are consistent with prior assertions that there are "emotional gaps" in remote/hybrid work when there is a reduction of informal communication/casualness and that relationship-oriented activities become less spontaneous (Pitšugina, 2024). Therefore, this study's participants articulated an ongoing sense of disconnection with one another, even while frequently communicating with each other; thus, establishing an ongoing emotional connection does not automatically occur through high levels of frequency of contact.

In addition, the participants' descriptions of difficulties associated with tone ambiguity and the lack of non-recorded/visual cues (Theme 2) also coincide with literature examining how the nature of communication through digitally mediated mediums impacts the meaning of the message. When a communication medium has fewer social/contextual cues, the

opportunity for ambiguity to arise increases; particularly in complex/emotionally charged communications, factual misinterpretation is likely to occur (Daft and Lengel, 1986). This finding also reflects the perspective of practitioners who suggest that digital collaboration requires greater awareness/effectiveness related to emotional stimuli because there are fewer emotional cues which makes the interpretation of emotional stimuli less reliable and more likely to result in an error in judgement (Dhawan and Chamorro-Premuzic 2018).

Participants indicated that Emotional Intelligence (EI) is not just a trait that you are born with but rather it is a set of behaviours which can be used to guide more successful behaviours in low-cue environments such as through empathy and emotional regulation when in stressful situations or through relationship management. This is in alignment with Goleman's definition of EI (1998) as a learned behaviour that occurs in the workplace; therefore, influencing collaboration, leadership and interpersonal relationships.

Equally important was the presence of trust and psychological security, as described in Theme 6, in both traditional team environments, where all team members felt safe to ask questions, express doubt, or raise concerns without fear of a negative response, and hybrid/remote working environments. The use of dependability, fairness, and regular communication as per participants' comments indicates additional care may be warranted to ensure that these protective factors exist in hybrid/ remote working environments, specifically given that asynchronous communications increase the likelihood of miscommunication (Olson & Olson, 2000).

5.2 Comparison with previous studies

Despite high communication frequencies in hybrid/remote teams, as shown in the findings (Theme 1), both relational signaling quality and shared understanding are also important for achieving emotional connection (e.g., Daft & Lengel, 1986; Dhawan & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2018). In essence, teams could have high levels of communication and still experience a sense of emotional detachment and decreased levels of bonding, if their interactions were primarily procedural or transactional in nature.

Another important finding is tension between how connect with one another and how efficiently they complete (Theme 3). Routine structures (such as daily meet-ups or task management systems) help with visibility and collaboration, however participants found

that these routine structures could lead to communication becoming more focused on how to complete a task and not leave much room for informal communication or relationship preservation. The findings indicate that, by focusing on communication for productivity, an organization may unintentionally reduce cohesiveness, especially if the organization also does not create opportunities for connecting with each other. In software and IT environments, where pressure, interdependence, and rapid changes are prevalent, the risk of creating friction and delays through misunderstandings is particularly elevated because small misunderstandings can lead to large problems (Madampe et al., 2024; Weichbroth et al., 2025).

Lastly, this research adds additional support and depth to the existing literature surrounding leadership in remote settings. By illustrating leadership's role as a mechanism to promote both the culture and psychological security of participants (Themes #5 and #6), this study's findings suggest that leaders help define the norms of behaviour (such as clarity, empathy, inclusivity, emotional availability) and provide emotional support for employees working remotely. The findings were consistent with prior research, which identifies the importance of implementing emotionally intelligent leadership behaviours at a distance due to limited visible cues and the need for leaders to respond in a manner that maintains employee trust and team cohesiveness (Goleman, 1998; Dhawan & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2018). However, participants also indicated that the development of emotional intelligence does not just rest with leaders; instead, emotional intelligence is distributed throughout the team via the team members' day-to-day behaviours (e.g., through everyday communication patterns, engaging in repair behaviours, providing peer-to-peer support).

5.3 Interpretation of findings

In summary, hybrid/remote team work comprises a collaboration system wherein the structural circumstances of digital media, less informal contact and asynchrony will produce relational and interpretive friction. Further, the presence of emotional intelligence (EI) behaviours act as practical mechanisms used by teams to manage frictions. At the interpersonal level of communication and coordination, digital channels of communication can limit social presence cues (more importantly in relation to the lack of non-verbal information) which thus increases the ambiguity in terms of "tone" and "intent" (Theme 2). As was outlined within the media richness literature, the decreased signalling from digital

channels will lead to greater misinterpretations of sensitive or complex situations and will require that more time and effort be spent building a mutual understanding of the situation (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Asynchrony will further complicate these situations as there will not be an immediate opportunity for feedback or correction, thereby resulting in the longer duration of unresolved misunderstandings and a greater amount of time and effort spent in the resolution of misunderstandings (Olson & Olson, 2000).

At an interpersonal level, respondents noted the presence of symptoms associated with emotional detachment and bonding reduction (Theme 1) that frequently coincided with the completion of task-focused routines (Theme 3). In this context, the EI behaviours that they illustrated appeared to be compensatory behaviours that may aid in returning the "humanised layer" of collaboration when there is limited ability or opportunity for co-presence and/or informal connection. Some EI behaviours that provide evidence of this are behaviour (e.g., empathic checking in, perspective taking, and using emotionally regulated behaviours to respond to situations of high stress) and relationship maintenance behaviours, which may help restore damaged relationships and provide evidence of inclusion (Themes 4 and 7). These behaviours provide evidence of an understanding of the practice-based nature of EI as an enacted process within interactions rather than as an assigned score based on a fixed measurement (Goleman, 1998). Ultimately, data suggest that trust and psychological security are not inherent features of hybrid or remote environments; rather, they are constructs that are co-created and contributed to by the combination of both structural conditions and everyday interactional practices (Theme 6).

Trust and psychological security are derived and enhanced through leaders and team members communicating effectively and consistently (reliable), and providing supportive responses to uncertainty during interactions. In turn, when these behaviours are exhibited there is an increased likelihood of team members asking for assistance, seeking guidance and/or speaking up, and all of these behaviours were noted in the literature as relating to the establishment of a psychologically safe team environment and facilitating team learning (Edmondson, 1999). Conversely, lack of emotionally based communication, unclear expectations, and low connection (i.e., an over-reliance on deliverables) all contributed to a withdrawal from participants emotionally and frustration running high, evidencing the ease at which trust can quickly diminish when operating within a context of digital ambiguity.

With that said, the evidence presented in this study substantially supports the conclusion that the collaboration gaps in hybrid/remote IT teams are more than just technological and structural challenges; they are also relational in nature and will not automatically disappear. Specifically, it appears that behaviors associated with emotional intelligence exhibited by leaders and peer members will facilitate bridging of the collaboration gap through improving interpretation of communication despite reduced cues, strengthening connection, and establishing continuing levels of trust and psychological safety over time (Pitšugina, 2024; Dhawan & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2018; Goleman, 1998; Edmondson, 1999).

6. Conclusion & Recommendations

This closing chapter of the dissertation summarises how the EI-related behaviours shape communication, bonding, and day-to-day effectiveness in hybrid and remote IT environments; translates these findings into practical recommendations for IT managers, HR functions and team members; and aims to support trust and a good climate, inclusion and collaboration in digitally mediated environments. In addition, the chapter provides an overview of the limitations of this study and potential directions for future research that will extend and validate the results across a wider range of samples and through different hybrid work design structures.

6.1 Key findings

This study has explored the behavioural components associated with Emotional Intelligence (EI) and their effect on communication, bonding between team members, and how effective teams feel they are on a day-to-day basis within hybrid and remote IT teams. Using ten semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis to support the results of the study, the researcher has outlined two main findings as follows:

1. Emotional distance remains despite continual communication. Participants viewed hybrid and remote methods of working as creating emotional distance and diminishing the bond between team members over time, even when the teams maintain regularised meetings and group messaging.
2. Increased ambiguity occurs with Digitally Mediated Communication (DMC); reduced/non-verbal cues and limited opportunities for informal interaction render tone and/or intention challenging to interpret which may cause misunderstandings and failures in communication.
3. By concentrating on tasks, relational maintenance may be compromised; at times the focus of communication is solely to deliver on tasks. Although this can create efficiencies, it also has an impact on team members' sense of connection, belonging, and shared team identity.
4. EI behaviours are a pragmatic interpersonal competence; EI behaviours including empathy signalling, emotion regulation, perspective taking, and relationship building enhance teams' ability to provide clarity, relieve

tension and promote constructive interaction under low cue environments (i.e., remote).

5. Leadership creates the emotional climate in distributed teams. Throughout this study, participants indicated that leadership behaviours create the norms for quality communication, inclusion, trust and cohesion within hybrid/remote teams.
6. Informal, daily interactions strengthen team bonding. Informal, unstructured interactions (e.g., casual conversations, sharing humour, and celebrating completed challenges) created stronger bonds than formalised “team-building” activities.
7. Hybrid team structure provides opportunities for inclusion, but can create barriers to inclusion as well. The use of hybrid work environments, office attendance patterns and use of asynchronous processes have the potential to enhance transparency and teamwork, but also increase exclusion or “visibility gaps” if not carefully designed, implemented and supported.

6.2 Practical recommendations for IT managers, HR and Leadership

Based on the findings, the following practical recommendations could strengthen the hybrid IT teamwork:

For IT managers and leaders

- Create regular and consistent moments with their team members, not just task updates.
- Treat emotional signals as data. Silence, shift in tone and change of behaviour are not just signals.
- Build inclusion within the team. Managers should make sure that colleagues who work remotely and those who work in the office have equal access to opportunities and contributions.
- Careful behaviours towards the team, as these can shape the climate and good relationships.

For HR and leadership development

- Evaluate the importance of EI and include it in development programs.
- Support managers with training in hybrid environments with focus on inclusion.
- Encourage team rituals that strengthen belonging (celebrations, recognition, routines).
- Promote cultures that make employees feel safe by promoting fairness and open dialogue.

Within the teams

- Normalise clarifying intent ('Can you please explain this to me further?', 'I might be reading this wrong').
- Have behaviours that enhance respect, appreciation, and casual connection.
- Create lightweight bonding moments ('wins of the week', informal channels).

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has some limitations that should be taken into account. Firstly, the sample size, which was ten, includes depth but limits generalizability. Second, the study relies on self-reported experience, which includes perception and meanings rather than objective metrics. Thirdly, interviews were taken in two languages, and although the Greek interviews have been translated to the closest meaning, that could shape nuance.

Future research could examine EI and hybrid collaboration in a larger sample of participants, explore different structures, specifically organisations or companies that use or do not use cameras explicitly or study how EI shape behaviours to repair disconnection after a big change.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions in English

Interview Questions

Section 1: Emotional Intelligence & Communication
1. How has communication changed from traditional in-person work settings to hybrid or remote ones? Can you provide some examples for comparison?
2. What kind of characteristics are crucial in the daily interactions of a team?
3. Can you remember a time when the way someone reacted made it easier or harder to talk in the team?
4. When working remotely, do you make a conscious effort to understand how others feel? If so, how and how important is it for you to understand what others are feeling?
5. Do you ever feel that team communication becomes more “task-focused” and less human in remote meetings? What helped you feel more connected in that situation?
Section 2: Team Bonding & Cohesion
6. In your experience, is it harder to build trust or feel connected with your team when working hybrid or remote?
7. What helps a team feel more united when not working from the same place?
8. Are there any tools or team habits that help a team to feel closer in hybrid or remote environments?
9. Have you ever felt emotionally disconnected from your team, even if you interacted with them daily in meetings?
10. What kind of moments make you feel truly connected with your remote team? (e.g. casual chats, jokes)
11. If you were mentoring someone new to remote teamwork, what would you tell them about how to build connections from a distance?

Section 3: Leadership & EI
12. What personal qualities do you think are most helpful for a manager or team lead in a remote or hybrid setup?
13. Can you think of an example when the way a leader responded to someone's emotions helped or hurt the team's performance?
14. Do you believe that understanding people's emotions can help leaders solve team problems more effectively in remote setups? Why or why not?
15. Have you seen leaders who were great in person but struggled to connect with people online?
16. When leaders avoid emotional conversations, how does that affect the team atmosphere?
Section 4: Collaboration & Performance
17. Can you share a moment when emotions helped or hindered collaboration?
18. Do you believe that understanding and managing emotions can help hybrid or remote IT teams work better?
19. Have you ever held back your true emotional reactions in a virtual meeting - feelings you might have shared more openly in person?
Section 5: Challenges & Strategies
20. What kind of emotional challenges have you experienced while you were working in a hybrid or remote environment?
21. If you could improve one thing about how teams handle feelings or communication in hybrid work, what would it be?
22. When something seems off with a teammate in a remote setting, what are the small signs you usually notice?

23. Have you ever felt emotionally tired from working online too much? What did you do to feel better or recharge emotionally?

Appendix B: Interview Questions in Greek language

Ερωτήσεις Συνέντευξης

Ενότητα 1: Συναισθηματική Νοημοσύνη & Επικοινωνία
1. Πώς έχει αλλάξει η επικοινωνία, σε σύγκριση με το παραδοσιακό, δια ζώσης εργασιακό περιβάλλον; Μπορείτε να δώσετε παραδείγματα για σύγκριση;
2. Ποια χαρακτηριστικά θεωρείτε κρίσιμα για τις καθημερινές αλληλεπιδράσεις μέσα σε μια ομάδα;
3. Θυμάστε μια στιγμή που ο τρόπος που αντέδρασε κάποιος έκανε την επικοινωνία στην ομάδα είτε πιο εύκολη είτε πιο δύσκολη;
4. Όταν εργάζεστε εξ αποστάσεως, προσπαθείτε συνειδητά να κατανοήσετε πώς αισθάνονται οι άλλοι; Αν ναι, πώς το κάνετε και πόσο σημαντικό είναι αυτό για εσάς;
5. Έχετε νιώσει ποτέ ότι η επικοινωνία στις απομακρυσμένες συναντήσεις γίνεται υπερβολικά προσανατολισμένη σε εργασίες (“task-focused”) και λιγότερο ανθρώπινη; Τι σας βοήθησε να νιώσετε πιο συνδεδεμένος/η σε αυτές τις περιπτώσεις;
Ενότητα 2: Συνοχή & Δέσιμο Ομάδας
6. Από την εμπειρία σας, είναι πιο δύσκολο να χτίσετε εμπιστοσύνη ή να νιώσετε δεμένοι με την ομάδα όταν εργάζεστε εξ αποστάσεως;
7. Τι βοηθά μια ομάδα να νιώθει ενωμένη όταν τα μέλη της δεν βρίσκονται στον ίδιο φυσικό χώρο;
8. Υπάρχουν εργαλεία ή συνήθειες της ομάδας που βοηθούν να νιώθετε πιο κοντά σε περιβάλλοντα εξ αποστάσεως ή υβριδικά;
9. Έχετε νιώσει ποτέ συναισθηματικά αποσυνδεδεμένος/η από την ομάδα, παρόλο που συμμετείχατε καθημερινά σε συναντήσεις;
10. Τι είδους στιγμές σας κάνουν να νιώθετε πραγματικά συνδεδεμένος/η με την ομάδα σας; (π.χ. χιουμοριστικές στιγμές, ανεπίσημες συζητήσεις, αλληλεγγύη...)

11. Αν καθοδηγούσατε έναν νέο συνεργάτη που εντάσσεται για πρώτη φορά σε απομακρυσμένη ομάδα, τι θα του λέγατε για να χτίσει σύνδεση από απόσταση;
Ενότητα 3: Ηγεσία & Συναισθηματική Νοημοσύνη
12. Ποιες προσωπικές ποιότητες θεωρείτε πιο χρήσιμες για έναν μάνατζερ ή επικεφαλής ομάδας σε υβριδικό ή απομακρυσμένο περιβάλλον;
13. Μπορείτε να σκεφτείτε ένα παράδειγμα όπου ο τρόπος που ένας ηγέτης αντέδρασε σε κάποιο συναίσθημα βοήθησε ή έβλαψε την απόδοση της ομάδας;
14. Πιστεύετε ότι η κατανόηση των συναισθημάτων μπορεί να βοηθήσει τους ηγέτες να επιλύουν προβλήματα ομάδας πιο αποτελεσματικά σε απομακρυσμένα περιβάλλοντα; Γιατί ή γιατί όχι;
15. Έχετε δει ηγέτες που ήταν πολύ καλοί δια ζώσης αλλά δυσκολεύτηκαν να συνδεθούν διαδικτυακά;
16. Όταν οι ηγέτες αποφεύγουν συναισθηματικές συζητήσεις, πώς επηρεάζεται το κλίμα της ομάδας;
Ενότητα 4: Συνεργασία & Απόδοση
17. Μπορείτε να μοιραστείτε μια στιγμή όπου τα συναισθήματα βοήθησαν ή εμπόδισαν τη συνεργασία σε ένα έργο;
18. Πιστεύετε ότι η κατανόηση και η διαχείριση των συναισθημάτων μπορεί να βοηθήσει τις IT ομάδες σε υβριδικό ή απομακρυσμένο πλαίσιο να αποδίδουν καλύτερα;
19. Έχετε συγκρατήσει ποτέ αυθόρμητες συναισθηματικές αντιδράσεις σας σε μια συνάντηση, συναισθήματα που θα εκφράζατε πιο εύκολα δια ζώσης;
Ενότητα 5: Προκλήσεις & Στρατηγικές Αντιμετώπισης
20. Τι είδους συναισθηματικές προκλήσεις έχετε βιώσει ενώ εργαζόσασταν σε υβριδικό ή απομακρυσμένο περιβάλλον;
21. Αν μπορούσατε να βελτιώσετε ένα πράγμα στον τρόπο που οι ομάδες διαχειρίζονται τα συναισθήματα ή την επικοινωνία στην εξ αποστάσεως εργασία, τι θα ήταν αυτό;

22. Όταν κάποιος συνάδελφος φαίνεται «εκτός», ποια μικρά σημάδια συνήθως παρατηρείτε; (π.χ. σιωπή, καθυστέρηση, αλλαγή τόνου...)

23. Έχετε νιώσει ποτέ συναισθηματικά εξαντλημένος/η από την πολλή διαδικτυακή εργασία; Τι κάνατε για να ανακάμψετε ή να αναζωογονηθείτε συναισθηματικά;

Author's Statement:

I hereby expressly declare that, according to the article 8 of Law 1559/1986, this dissertation is solely the product of my personal work, does not infringe any intellectual property, personality and personal data rights of third parties, does not contain works/contributions from third parties for which the permission of the authors/beneficiaries is required, is not the product of partial or total plagiarism, and that the sources used are limited to the literature references alone and meet the rules of scientific citations.