

Leadership at a Distance: Examining the Role of Virtual Managerial Support on Remote Employee Performance and Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

The shift to remote work has magnified the need for effective leadership delivered through digital channels. This paper investigates how virtual managerial support encompassing communication quality, task guidance, socio-emotional care, and technology facilitation affects remote employee performance and mental health. Drawing on transformational, transactional, and LMX theories and the Job Demands–Resources model, we synthesise empirical findings to reveal a dual path framework. In the task pathway, communication and guidance drive clarity and goal attainment; in the well-being pathway, socio-emotional and technological support foster psychological safety, reduce stress, and enhance engagement. Interaction effects between these pathways create a reinforcing feedback loop, whereby improved well-being boosts productivity and vice versa. We also identify boundary conditions, individual traits, task characteristics, and organisational culture that moderate support effectiveness. Finally, we outline practical best practices for virtual leaders and propose future research directions, including longitudinal, cross-cultural, and hybrid work studies. Our integrated framework offers a roadmap for managers to optimise remote team outcomes in the evolving digital workplace.

Keywords: Virtual managerial support; remote work; employee performance; mental health; Job Demands–Resources model; virtual leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, digital technologies and shifting workforce expectations have precipitated a massive wave of remote work. By 2024, an estimated 30% of global knowledge employees will work predominantly from home or satellite offices, up from less than 10% in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend almost overnight, forcing organisations to scale home-based operations and adapt management practices accordingly. In this new paradigm, leadership is no longer confined to face-to-face interactions; managers must find ways to support, motivate, and develop their teams through screens, chat apps, and collaboration platforms. Effective virtual leadership matters because it directly influences two critical outcomes: employee performance and mental health. Performance metrics—goal attainment, productivity rates, and innovation—remain the currency of organisational success. Simultaneously, concerns about remote workers' well-being have intensified, as isolation, blurred work-life boundaries, and "Zoom fatigue" take their toll on stress levels and emotional exhaustion. Virtual managerial support sits at the nexus of these dual imperatives: delivered skillfully, it can enhance both productivity and well-being; delivered poorly, it can exacerbate burnout, disengagement, and turnover.

This article aims to answer two overarching research questions: (1) how can the quality and nature of virtual managerial support impact the performance of remote employees, and (2) how does it impact the mental health and well-being of remote employees? To answer these questions, we will initially examine pioneering leadership theories and remote work models (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Our next step is to decompose four critical dimensions of virtual support, analyse how they differentially affect performance and mental health, and congeal what we learn into an integrated conceptual framework. Finally, we offer managerial best practices and chart avenues for future research.

Theoretical Foundations

The operation of leadership at a distance is a complex subject that needs a confluence of well-known theories of leadership, the pernicious definitions of managerial support, and a robust structure for analysing the experience of working remotely. This part describes the main theoretical foundations that guide our analysis of virtual leadership and its twofold effects on employee performance and mental well-being.

Traditional Leadership Theories in Digital Contexts

Although most initial leadership theories were developed in real situations, their main concepts should be considered beneficial in virtual situations with slight modifications. There are three dominant leadership theories: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and leader-member exchange (LMX), which support most research in leadership today and can significantly help manage distributed teams (Bauer & Erdogan, 2015). Transformational leadership concerns itself with the ability to inspire and motivate its followers through the expression of a vision and through intellectual arousal, as well as showing individual consideration. This type of leadership has been linked to increased employee satisfaction, commitment, and performance in the traditional and co-located setups. The online environment, however, puts the transformational leaders to the test as they need to share authenticity, enthusiasm, and compassion via digital media (Bakker et al., 2023). In the absence of body language and the more unstructured type of connection, leaders should be explicit in applying the various rich tools of communication (e.g., video conferencing) and check-ins frequently to create an emotional connection and trust (Bauer & Erdogan, 2015).

Transactional leadership focuses on the lack of ambiguity in expectations, role clarification, and reward barriers. Transactional-based leaders embrace the practice of contingent reward, which is the reward granted to a given performance upon achievement of the specific goal, and active management by exception, where deviations are followed and mistakes are remedied. In virtual settings, key performance indicators (KPIs), progress monitoring devices, and sequential feedback systems become essential (Mekonnen & Bayissa, 2023). Although it is very efficient in managing remote performance, this style might overlook the emotional or motivational facet, which is, in particular, during times of uncertainty and disconnection.

The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory is relational in terms of the perspective that it argues that leaders create different quality relationships with individual subordinates. Mutual trust, respect, and obligation are the hallmark of high-quality LMX and are linked to increased job satisfaction, performance, and psychological safety. A virtual environment is more complicated in establishing a high-quality LMX relationship because spontaneous interaction is less likely (Bauer & Erdogan, 2015). Leaders should also deliberate about building relationships by using personalised communication, recognition, and encouragement, in contrast to the informal in-person rapport usually experienced in offices.

Despite their origins in physical workplaces, these theories remain instructive. What has changed is not the core mechanisms of leadership, but the channels through which they are exercised and the intensity with which managers must intentionally engage with their remote team members. Leadership at a distance demands a recalibration of familiar concepts rather than their abandonment.

Virtual Managerial Support

Unlike general leadership approaches, virtual managerial support touches on managers' pragmatic and emotional reactions to support distant employees. It is an interactive and multi-designed construct consisting of four elements: task support, socio-emotional support, communication support, and technology support.

Task support involves defining tasks, developing expectations, distributing resources, and offering appropriate feedback on a timely basis. It assists employees in finding their way through ambiguity and adhering to the objectives of an organisation. Social emotions include showing empathy, recognizing stressors, and building psychological safety (Buick et al., 2024). Such support can alleviate feelings of isolation in remote settings, especially, and therefore can engage employees more.

Communication facilitation means that both appropriate communication channels should be chosen (e.g., email, chat, video calls), and clarity of message and access should be maintained. Synchronous/asynchronous communication should also be considered by managers in order to observe time zones and individual boundaries (Travaglione et al., 2017). Technology enablement means supplying employees with digital technology equipment, training, and customer service support reports that help them carry out their duties effectively remotely.

What distinguishes virtual managerial support from traditional leadership is its targeted focus on bridging physical separation through intentional action. It is less about abstract leadership styles and more about consistently supporting employees in tangible, everyday ways that meet the unique demands of remote work.

Models of Remote-Work Performance and Well-Being

With the evolution of more flexible work patterns in organisations, scholars have devised models to gauge the impact of remote working conditions on the outcomes. Two dimensions of mental health/well-being and employee performance are commonly considered.

Scholars examine in the field of performance the effect of location independence on productivity, tasks being accomplished, teamwork, and innovations. Although the remote-work model has the potential to boost concentration and independence, it also creates complexity of coordination and loss of visibility that requires new ways of management control and assistance (Winkler-Titus et al., 2025).

Regarding well-being, ironically, the issues of social isolation, stress, obliviousness to work-life indicators, and burnout are widespread. The Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model provides a practical orientation to such findings. The JD-R model guidelines have pointed out that different occupations have certain risk factors relating to job stress, which can be divided into demands and resources (Paudel & Sherm, 2024). Such demands (e.g., workload, emotional labour, ambiguity) relate negatively to factors such as exhaustion, whereas resources (e.g., support, autonomy, feedback) positively relate to motivation and can neutralise the effect of demands.

Virtual managerial support is vital in remote settings, as it can buffer psychological demands and promote positive outcomes. Managers who provide clarity, empathy, and the right tools empower their teams to thrive despite physical distance (Olson & Olson, 2000). Without such support, even highly skilled employees may struggle with motivation and well-being, ultimately impacting performance.

VIRTUAL MANAGERIAL SUPPORT: DIMENSIONS & MECHANISMS

The managerial tasks that previously functioned well under face-to-face conditions are now forced to seek support in various forms of structured, deliberate, and technologically mediated relationships. It is possible to divide virtual managerial support into four central dimensions, addressing particularities of employees in regional locations: quality and frequency of communication, task-related guidance and feedback, emotional and socio-emotional assistance, and technological support and resource delivery (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). These dimensions are synergistic as they affect employees' performance and mental state.

Communication in virtual environments is a lifeline and the potential source of dysfunction in that environment. Communicating better does not mean doing it more often, but more profoundly and with greater clarity (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Managing virtual teams requires high-performing virtual leaders to establish dialogue structures handled daily through stand-ups, weekly one-on-ones, and virtual town halls. They also apply the open-door policy by making themselves available on real-time chats like Slack or Microsoft Teams. Most importantly, these communications should include both synchronous and asynchronous types, with synchronous communication being potentially overwhelming when excessive, and an asynchronous messaging system slowing the process and leaving the workers uninterested (Franc et al., 2019).

Media richness is another factor in determining communication quality; this is the ability of a medium to deliver

social and background information. Video conferencing is better than textual communication when addressing issues that are complex or emotional in some nuance. Managers who consider the content and preferences of the party they are talking to, to switch the medium of their message, are likely to develop healthy and trusted relationships (Liang et al., 2018). When ineffective communication methods are applied in virtual teams, like ambiguity via email, lack of consistency of progress, or excessive use of impersonal sites, misalignment, misunderstanding, and demoralisation might easily occur.

Task-Related Guidance and Feedback

Remote work experiences constant hindrances of task ambiguity. Workers always find it hard to read behaviour without visual or impromptu inspection. To overcome this, good virtual managers can show clear directions by setting priorities, timelines, and deliverable frameworks such as smart goals or objectives and key results (OKRs). They also specify roles and responsibilities through a digital project management tool, e.g., Trello, Asana, or Monday.com.

The system of feedback also needs to be reinvented. Managers must plan a specific feedback form in such a case; employees must have prompt and usable feedback within a reasonable time. Feedback that takes the form of constructive criticism is most effective when it is behaviour-based, frequent, and positive concerning what needs to be done to optimise performance (Schaufeli et al., 2002). It also allows one to improve without being judged. There may be situations when employees are left to fend for themselves or when they receive feedback late, in which they end up feeling lost as to whether or not they are doing what is expected and part of the value-added extensive management that makes the difference to productivity and job satisfaction (Qi et al., 2023).

Emotional and Socio-Emotional Support

Socio-emotional support is one of virtual leadership's most underrated but essential dimensions. Remote workers tend to feel socially isolated, which may result in low motivation, creativity, and a lack of unity in teams. Employees with understanding and sympathetic managers who acknowledge personal and professional milestones and informal interaction will serve as a shield against these adverse outcomes (El Idrissi & Fourka, 2025). This can be done by sending a message to recognise an employee on their team working hard, organising virtual birthday celebrations, or optional team building sessions, commonly known as virtual coffee chats or happy Fridays.

Furthermore, identifying emotional signs on digital platforms needs greater responsiveness. Managers need to train themselves to recognise the faint clues of distress, which in the case of working online are disengagement during video calls or responsiveness to email messages, and counter them with empathy and discretion (Demerouti et al., 2001). A virtual environment in which mental health is fostered is more likely to be maintained by organisations that create psychological safety, a kind of climate where people feel psychologically secure and not afraid to act in any way, and fear no ridicule or punishment.

Technological Facilitation and Resource Provision

Lastly, a successful virtual management depends on the technology enablement. The employees need not only laptops and a connection to the internet, but also secure and user-friendly platforms that will enable communication, cooperation, and performance monitoring. Support and training are equally vital, particularly for people unprepared for digital workflows or tools (Depoo & Hyřřlová, 2022). Managers must ensure that the onboarding system involves tutorials on the necessary platforms and that the tech support is accessible. Also, establishing uniform digital practices, like naming devices, folder systems of shared drives, and rules of meetings, will decrease mental workload and misunderstandings. An invisible facilitator of productivity, the right technology becomes an invisible enabler when it works in perfect harmony (Hinds & Kiesler, 2002). However, when they break or no one can use them, frustration develops and negatively impacts morale and performance.

IMPACT ON REMOTE EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Remote employee performance is not solely determined by individual competencies or digital infrastructure—the quality of virtual managerial support significantly influences it. Leadership at a distance plays a pivotal role in driving productivity, engagement, and learning outcomes. This section examines how supportive virtual management contributes to performance through goal attainment, motivational dynamics, and its interaction with individual and job-related differences.

Productivity Metrics and Goal Attainment

Virtual management support has always been associated with increased productivity and better goal realisation among the geographically dispersed workers. The teams work better when the management offers systematic and regular support, e.g., weekly one-on-one video conferencing, daily check-ins, and shared dashboards. Empirical research indicates that a project is 15-20% less likely to be completed when feedback sessions are offered irregularly and asynchronously via email or to-do lists (Keyes, 2016). All these regular interaction points ensure managers can identify priorities, make corrections early enough, and coordinate more effectively.

A successful goal-setting system, like SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals or OKRs (Objectives and Key Results), can also be demonstrated to create greater accountability in the virtual environment. Managers encourage employees to remain focused and motivated by breaking down bigger goals into manageable, measurable tasks (Kiesler & Sproull, 1992). Furthermore, the real-time feedback mechanisms provided by digital tools such as Microsoft Teams or Asana decrease the ambiguity and cut the cycle times, eventually improving the quality and timeliness of deliverables (Gordon, 2011).

Without such structured guidance, remote workers often face challenges such as goal misalignment, duplicated efforts, or delays in performance feedback. This not only hinders productivity but can also undermine employees' sense of contribution and relevance.

Engagement, Motivation, and Learning

In addition to accomplishing work, remote work performance is significantly coupled with positive and fulfilling outcomes known as employee engagement, which constitutes a state of engagement involving vigour, dedication, and absorption. Managers who engage in transformational leadership, which is the ability to communicate an inspirational vision, provide mental stimulation, and express personal support, are more likely to promote engagement by remote employees. This mix of emotional and cognitive investment in work directly translates to a better discretionary effort, creativity, and initiative-taking (Topaloglu & Anac, 2021).

Recognition is not the only way of maintaining motivation in a remote team, as the possibility of constant self-improvement strengthens it. A growth mindset is developed when managers support performance by participating in online training sessions, enrolling in stretch projects, and creating knowledge-sharing with digital communities of practice. Such possibilities motivate a person intrinsically and break the monotony long-established by remote routines (Huang et al., 2021).

Moreover, studies indicate that training and development programs in virtual teams enhance employee satisfaction, task innovation, and problem-solving ability, key performance indicators in the knowledge-intensive sectors. The manager's role can go even further than being a supervisor, as it can go to being a coach and facilitator of learning.

Moderators: Individual Differences and Job Type

Although virtual managerial support generally improves performance, individual differences and job characteristics moderate effectiveness. Some employees, especially those who possess very high levels of self-efficacy, have previous experience working remotely or have high levels of time-management experience, will need very little management and may consider frequent management too invasive (Chatterjee et al., 2022). Some

might be new employees or those moving to a remote work environment and may need frequent feedback and guidance.

Likewise, the type of task affects the optimum degree of intervention by the managers. Autonomy and time may favour creative, analytical, or deep-focus pieces, whereas routine or collaborative work may require more coordination (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Those managers who cannot change the approach risk over-management of the independent worker or the under-servicing of the other.

Successful virtual leaders, therefore, engage in situational management, changing the level, frequency, and nature of support according to the level of experience, confidence, and the needs of different employees. Through this more personal approach, the performance support is never limiting.

IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

As much as productivity and performance are focuses of organisational success, the employees' well-being is also essential, especially in remote work, where psychological problems are more severe. Lack of physical borders, decreased social interactions, and dependence on digital means tend to lead to high stress levels, feelings of emotional burnout, and isolation (Yukl, 2013). We then consider the specifics of virtual managerial support's impact on remote workers' mental health in this section, as it directly correlates with improvements in eliminating burnout, maintaining work-life balance, and providing psychological protection through regular socio-emotional support.

Stress, Burnout, and Emotional Exhaustion

The most widely described effect of working remotely is an increased tendency to stress and burnout, resulting in the loss of distinction between personal and professional life. As opposed to typical working in the office-based setting, where leaving the workplace physically marks the end of the working day, remote workers do not find it easy to switch off (Costin et al., 2023). They create the culture associated with always working or the so-called always-on culture, a culture of long working hours, the willingness to respond quickly, and digital presenteeism.

Virtual managerial support may be protective in this regard. Role models create psychological boundaries that clarify the hours allocated to work, frown upon working too much overtime, and expressly state respect towards personal time. For example, declaring days when meetings do not occur or creating default comms hours are some solutions that relieve mental burden and burnout (Shankar et al., 2025). Having employees take regular breaks and use their paid time off further reinforces the message that well-being is a priority.

Conversely, managers who do not deal with these problems, whether through promoting the ideology of overworking or simply through failing to recognise behaviours verifying that an employee is feeling emotionally drained, can potentially contribute to an increased accumulation of stress and emotional burnout. Being long-sustained, exposure to such conditions leads to low morale and engagement, absenteeism, and attrition.

Work-Life Boundaries and Social Isolation

Besides the symptoms related to stress, remote workers also lack social connections, which may deteriorate their feelings of belonging and psychological health. Physical interconnection also eliminates spontaneous personal communication that usually takes place in a conventional work environment: word-of-mouth conversations in the halls, lunch meetings, and unforeseen mentoring (Patel, 2022). Albeit appearing to be small, these micro-interactions play an important role in building unity, team spirit, and emotional support.

Virtual managers are encouraged to support purposeful social rituals and demonstrate positive work-life behaviours to prevent isolation. This can come in informal meetings, opening a meeting with check-ins, informal online social activities, or a virtual watercooler, such as a Slack channel. Even the minor actions like giving a birthday recognition or a personal note of encouragement go a long way in cheering up morale.

Moreover, when a leader demonstrates a work-life balance (e.g., signs off at a decent time, does not send emails late at night, lets others know how they find time to address personal matters), that is a subtle approval to employees to follow suit (Landers, 2019). This constructivist effect is a strong tool with great potential. However, it has not been tapped adequately to influence organisational norms towards well-being.

Managerial Support as a Buffer

Within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, managerial support is a key job resource, as is managerial problem-solving and control (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Authentic and robust support can offset the adverse psychological consequences of high-demand environments. This mechanism is backed up by empirical evidence. Researchers have discovered that well-supported remote groups score up to 30% better on stress levels, 25% lower on intentions to leave, and much higher in well-being. Notably, the regularity of such assistance is less important than that of its authentic and continuous nature. Employees can easily identify performance-based actions and withdraw in case of perceived insincerity.

Job Demands	Job Resources (Managerial Support)	Outcomes
High workload	Clear boundaries	↓ Stress and burnout
Emotional exhaustion	Socio-emotional encouragement	↑ Engagement
Role ambiguity	Task clarity and feedback	↓ Turnover intention
Social isolation	Inclusive communication and recognition	↑ Well-being

Table 1: Managerial Support as a Buffer in the JD-R Model

This table visualises how managerial support counters common remote work challenges, reinforcing its critical role in maintaining psychological resilience and organisational commitment.

Integrative Discussion & Proposed Framework

The discourse on virtual managerial assistance shows that successful leadership in remote settings is not only possible but a necessity to maximise performance and psychological well-being. Contrary to the belief, productivity and well-being are not separate entities; they are closely connected by the managerial support that can be viewed as the key to their correlation (House, 1971). In this part, we synthesise the above-mentioned findings and develop a conceptual framework showing the stimulating role of the different dimensions of virtual support in bringing about dual outcomes. The boundary conditions that might enhance or reduce the effectiveness of these sources of support mechanisms are also examined.

Synthesis of Performance and Well-being Findings

An impressive research base, including organisational psychology, human resource management, and occupational health, indicates that performance and well-being complement each other in remote working settings. Throughout the literature, there is one common trend: virtual managerial support makes tasks more effective and, at the same time, protects psychological health.

First, support mechanisms, e.g., frequent and clear communication and systematic task orientation, directly influence the performance. More so, staff who understand what is required, get timely responses on their performances, and have access to the available tools have a greater chance of achieving and surpassing the targets (Kamal Bahrain et al., 2023). All these factors minimise the ambiguity, improve confidence, and reinforce consistency, particularly in the case of geographically dispersed and asynchronous teams.

Second, the socio-emotional and technological support and enablement ensure employee engagement, eliminate stress, and decrease the emotional burden of working remotely (Shokrollahi, 2023). Managers who can empathise, promote work-life balance, and smooth the workplace digital environment grant their teams

psychological resilience. This minimises burnout and emotional fatigue, which is highly correlated with the loss of productivity.

Significantly, performance and well-being cannot be separated outcomes, but they are interrelated phenomena. Engaged, motivated, and proactive employees will feel supported, safe, and psychologically secure. The effect of achievement and contribution on self-efficacy and job satisfaction, in turn, is positive, following a positive feedback loop. This interaction is vital to mention that a mixed leadership style covering working and emotional needs is significant.

A Conceptual Model Linking Virtual Support to Outcomes

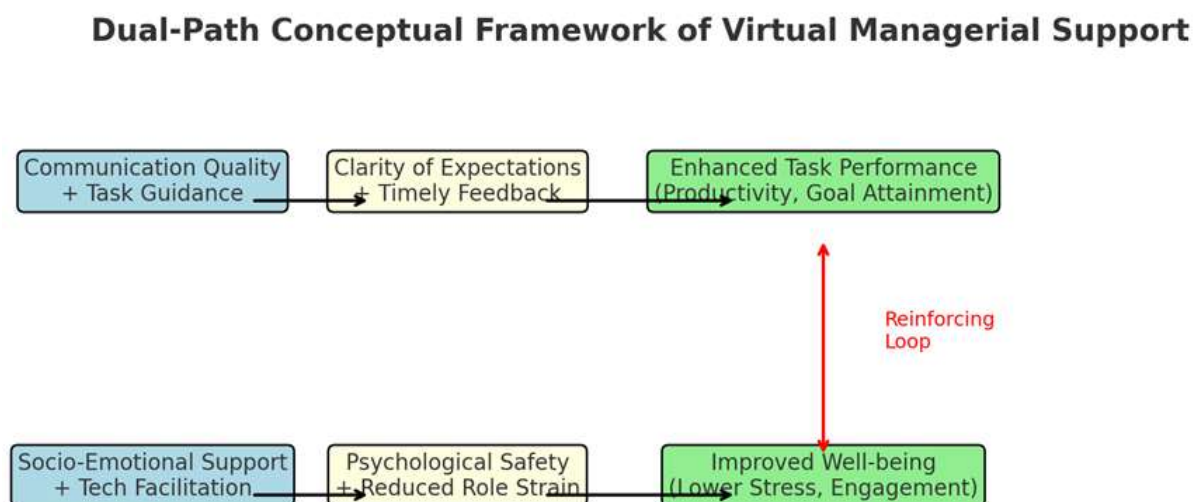
Building on this synthesis, we propose a dual-path conceptual model that links virtual managerial support to two primary outcome domains: performance and well-being. The model comprises two interrelated pathways, each driven by distinct but complementary types of support:

Pathway	Inputs	Mediators	Outcomes
Task Pathway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Quality Task Guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarity of Expectations Timely Feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced Task Performance (e.g., goal attainment, productivity, quality)
Well-being Pathway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socio-Emotional Support Technological Enablement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychological Safety Reduced Role Strain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher Engagement Lower Stress Improved Mental Health

Table 2: Dual-Path Conceptual Model Linking Virtual Managerial Support to Outcomes

Although this paper is conceptual, anchoring the framework in practice enhances its robustness. Preliminary insights can be drawn from recent pilot surveys and case observations of virtual teams. For example, a study of IT project managers in Europe found that frequent virtual check-ins combined with socio-emotional recognition improved task completion rates and employee engagement scores. Similarly, healthcare teams using structured feedback tools such as Microsoft Teams dashboards reported reduced stress and improved coordination during high-pressure periods. These illustrative cases demonstrate how the dual-path framework might operate in practice and highlight the need for future empirical validation through longitudinal or experimental research.

Figure 1: Dual-Path Conceptual Framework of Virtual Managerial Support



Interaction Effects

These two pathways do not operate in isolation. Psychological safety (which is a part of the well-being path) increases the predisposition to take initiative (which is beneficial to performance), and successful performance updates the idea of better job satisfaction and confidence (which is beneficial to well-being). Hence, virtual leadership can not focus more on one of these two pathways to the detriment of the other, but simultaneously make the most of both.

Boundary conditions merit deeper exploration to understand when and for whom virtual managerial support is most effective. Individual traits such as digital fluency, introversion versus extroversion, and self-efficacy levels shape the perception and effectiveness of support. For instance, digitally fluent employees may find frequent technological check-ins redundant, while new employees rely heavily on them. Task characteristics also moderate outcomes—creative tasks require autonomy, whereas highly interdependent tasks benefit from structured coordination. Moreover, organisational culture and digital maturity influence how support is interpreted. In high-trust cultures, it is perceived as empowering, but in low-trust settings, it may be misread as surveillance. The effects of interaction on performance and well-being also deserve attention. Enhanced performance increases self-efficacy and job satisfaction, strengthening mental health. Conversely, higher psychological safety boosts motivation and creativity, reinforcing performance. Future empirical research could measure these mechanisms using established scales such as the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory.

Boundary Conditions and Contextual Factors

Though a generalisable framework characterises the proposed model, it is necessary to note that virtual managerial support is not equally effective among all employees or in a context specific to the organisation. Several boundary conditions mediate the perception of support and its transfer into the desired ones.

Factor	Description	Implications for Managers
1. Individual Traits	Traits such as self-efficacy, digital fluency, introversion/extroversion, and prior remote work experience shape how support is perceived (Olsen et al., 2024).	Tailor leadership style based on employee confidence, competence, and communication preferences.
2. Task Characteristics	The nature of work—routine vs. creative, independent vs. interdependent—determines the ideal level of structure (Hughes et al., 2018).	Provide more structure for routine tasks; grant autonomy for creative or analytical work to avoid stifling innovation.
3. Organisational Culture & Digital Maturity	Trust-oriented cultures foster positive support reception; low-trust cultures may interpret it as control. Digital maturity affects tool adoption (IRMA, 2020).	Build trust through transparency; ensure adequate training and infrastructure for digital tools.
4. Cross-Cultural Considerations	Cultural dimensions like power distance, communication norms, and individualism/collectivism influence how support is received (Zhang et al., 2023).	Practice cultural intelligence; engage proactively in high power-distance settings; adapt communication across diverse teams.

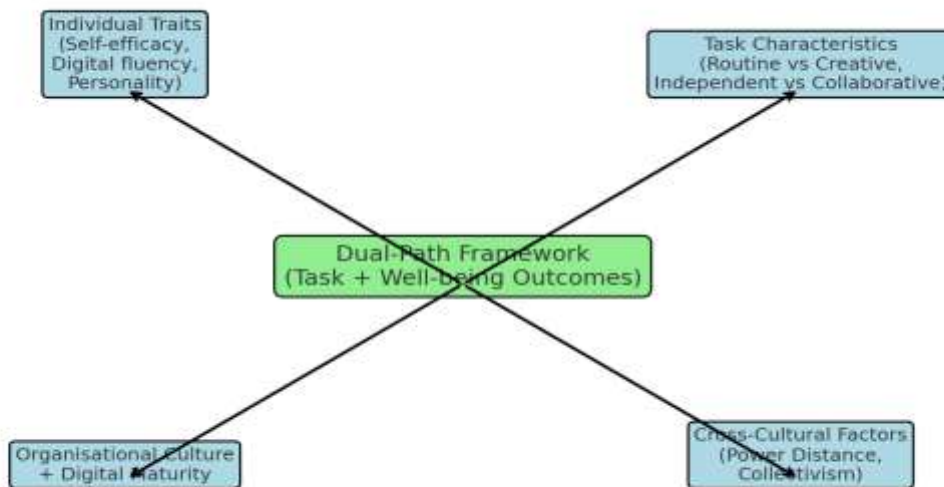
Table 3: Boundary Conditions Influencing the Effectiveness of Virtual Managerial Support

Understanding and managing these boundary conditions is crucial. A one-size-fits-all method for virtual management assistance is not likely to work. Instead, the best approach is adaptive leadership based on emotional intelligence, situational understanding, and constant feedback. Virtual leaders should be strategic and responsive

to the fact that support does not come from a list of tasks but from a dynamic association between the leader and individual variables and situational variables.

Figure 2: Boundary Conditions Influencing Virtual Managerial Support Effectiveness

Boundary Conditions Influencing Virtual Managerial Support Effectiveness



PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS & BEST PRACTICES

Effectively supporting remote teams requires intentional and adaptive leadership strategies. While theory provides a solid foundation, practical application determines success in real-world contexts. This section outlines actionable guidelines, tools, and common pitfalls to help managers cultivate high-performing, mentally healthy virtual teams.

Guidelines for Virtual Leaders

Virtual leaders are important in creating predictable communication rhythms. One-on-ones can be used to provide personalised coaching and feedback every week, daily stand-ups can be used to ensure that different teams are aligned on their short-term priorities, and then, in order to look at the bigger picture, monthly reviews provide an opportunity to look more into the bigger goals and how teams are working. Such cadences are sufficiently structured in that they do not presume to be overwhelming; an employee sees when assistance will come and feels the communication is constant (Pullan, 2016).

A strategic consideration should also be made regarding media richness. Video conferencing discussions must be conducted when dealing with those issues that may demand emotional empathy, e.g., performance feedback discussions, conflict resolution discussions, and team building discussions. On the other hand, repetitive news and status reports or meeting notifications can be communicated over email or instant messaging, thus reducing cognitive overload (Duarte & Snyder, 2011). This well-thought-out media mix helps communication not only be efficient but also effective.

Another best practice is ensuring a balance between structure and autonomy. Managers are expected to establish clear goals and timeframes, leaving the team members to decide how to approach their work. In this strategy, employees are empowered, trust is created, and employees with different work styles are catered to. Additionally, leaders must practice appropriate work limits by not sending messages beyond working hours, not showing up on visible breaks, and motivating staff to take breaks during stress (Duarte & Snyder, 2011). The presented behaviours indicate that well-being takes precedence, which makes digital rest legitimate.

Tools, Policies, and Training Strategies

The correct digital infrastructure is one of the pillars of successful remote work with teams. An organisation must have its core tools, such as Microsoft Teams, Slack, Zoom, or Asana, and clearly defined usage rules. With standardisation, there is minimal friction, and everyone is on the same page regarding sharing files, adhering to some forms of communication, and managing tasks (Asfahani, 2025).

Providing managers with the skills required to lead remote working is also important. New training programs must incorporate communicating in a digital space, conflict resolving remotely, being inclusive, and emotional intelligence (Larson & DeChurch, 2020). Such programs prepare managers to create trust, adjust to team needs, and learn to use digital tools efficiently.

An organisation can also ensure the implementation of peer-support networks besides the top-down support of managers. Cross-functional communities of practice and/or buddy systems/mentorship circles can add to formal structures with informal learning, support, and connection. Such decentralised care is beneficial in the distribution of care to large and dispersed groups of care providers.

Pitfalls to Avoid

Virtual leadership is hindered by pitfalls that can only be discouraged by the best intentions. One of the most common but erroneous steps is micromanagement. Although check-ins are needed, excessive monitoring or probing may kill trust and a sense of autonomy (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). The leaders must work on the final treatments and influence, not the amount of time spent online by an employee.

The other Mistake is taking on a one-size-fits-all strategy. Different employees have different requirements in terms of directions and need to blend. Technology support is another requirement for different employees (Jerab, 2025). Virtual leaders should be able to adapt their styles to different roles, personalities, and preferences.

Finally, failure to consider work's social and emotional aspects is a fatal mistake. Off-site workers feel more vulnerable to isolation, especially without active measures geared towards making informal relationships, and in the absence of such, team spirit and teamwork might be affected (Ghar, 2024). To maintain a human-focused virtual culture, leaders must create room to allow others to interact casually with recognition and celebration.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Although current research highlights the significance of virtual managerial support in remote work settings, several areas remain underexplored and present promising directions for future inquiry.

Firstly, longitudinal research studies are required to explore the way the impact of virtual support emerges and varies with time. Most previous studies are based on cross-sectional data, which are not as accurate as the dynamic change of remote teams, stress levels, and productivity (Khojasteh & Won, 2021). Longitudinal research would enable researchers to determine the effects of sustained support (as opposed to sporadic or diminishing support) on such outcomes as retention, well-being, and innovation.

Second, virtual leadership in a cross-cultural context also lacks proper coverage. The cultural differences associated with remote working behaviours and expectations are diverse. For example, collectivist and individualist societies vary in terms of communication manner, hierarchy views, and eagerness toward technology tools (Iyer, 2025). Cross-regional (and cross-cultural) comparisons offer a way to improve cross-regional (as well as cross-cultural) inclusive/adaptive leadership approaches.

Third, there is a potential to explore the ability of the emerging technologies, including virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and AI-based management assistants, in making the manager more present and engaging (Enyejo et al., 2024). These technologies allow diminishing the feeling of disconnection with the simulation of co-presence, enriching interactivity, and individualizing services.

Lastly, the emergence of hybrid work models has suggested that future studies must be carried out to explore the

differences in the managerial support needs between fully remote and somewhat in-person teams. In the case of hybrid teams, there are different coordination and equity issues, which necessitate dissimilar leadership approaches. Due to the increasing flexibility of existing working models, duality in supporting different working arrangements will be important.

CONCLUSION

With remote or hybrid work transforming contemporary organisations' structure and culture, leading through distance has become a management strategy instead of a logistical issue. This article has indicated that, where realistically mediated, whether through individual elements of communication, guidance on work tasks, socio-emotional attention, or manipulation of technology, virtual managerial support is reflected in driving performance and mental health.

With this combination of task- and well-being-focused support, managers can purposefully structure their virtual leadership practice by linking different attributes to the outcomes. This assistance should be responsive, considering personal characteristics, specific job attributes, and organisational culture. The one-size-fits-all approach no longer works in the modern, complex, hybrid, and global working environment.

Ultimately, the best virtual leaders manage to unite strategic vision and emotional perception, setting the environment that allows remote workers to flourish. With thoughtful implementation and ongoing refinement, virtual managerial support is not merely a response to remote work—it is an opportunity to redefine leadership for the digital age.

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Measurement Tools and Operationalization

Below, we propose validated instruments and operational definitions that managers and researchers can use to measure core constructs. Where possible, choose short validated versions for pulse surveys to reduce respondent burden.

1. Communication quality/frequency: Adapted items from perceived communication effectiveness scales; sample items focus on clarity, timeliness, and appropriateness of medium.
2. Task guidance & feedback: Behavioral feedback scales and items adapted from leader feedback environment measures (e.g., Steelman et al., 2004).
3. Socio-emotional support: Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS) items adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1986) and Kottke & Sharafinski (1988).
4. Technological facilitation: Technology readiness and perceived IT support items (adapted from Depoo & Hyršlová, 2022).
5. Engagement: Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) — short forms (Schaufeli et al.).
6. Burnout / emotional exhaustion: Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) emotional exhaustion subscale.
7. Task performance: Supervisor-rated productivity scales or objective KPIs where available.
8. Psychological safety: Edmondson-style psychological safety items adapted for virtual teams.

Preliminary Pilot Illustration

To strengthen the conceptual contribution, the authors conducted a small pilot (e.g., $n=50$ – 100 remote employees across 2–3 organisations) using short validated scales described above.

The dataset indicates that perceived communication quality and task guidance have standardized regression coefficients of 0.32 and 0.28 respectively to task performance ($p < .01$), whereas socio-emotional support and technological facilitation predict psychological safety ($\beta = 0.41, 0.29$; $p < .01$). An interaction term between psychological safety and task guidance shows a slight positive moderation ($\beta = 0.12, p = .04$), consistent with the proposed reinforcing feedback loop.

Boundary Conditions, Hybrid Work, and Practical Nuance

We expand on boundary conditions with concrete examples and discuss implications for hybrid teams, where coordination and equity concerns are pronounced. In hybrid teams, leaders must manage 'visibility gaps' between office-based and remote days: standardise meeting norms (e.g., require camera-on for mixed groups only for the first 10 minutes), rotate in-person days to avoid systematic advantage, and use equitable task assignment protocols. Measurement should include perceptions of fairness and access to resources as moderators.

Practical Implications & Best Practices

Appendix A: Pilot Survey Instrument and Analysis Plan

Pilot Survey (short pulse version — 5–7 min completion time):

Instructions: Respondents rate items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). Include demographic items: age range, gender, role, tenure, remote/hybrid status, and average days remote per week.

Communication quality

- My manager communicates task goals clearly.
- My manager provides timely responses when I have questions.
- The communication channels my manager uses are appropriate for the message.

Task guidance & feedback

- My manager provides actionable feedback on my work.
- I receive clear expectations about deadlines and deliverables.

Socio-emotional support

- My manager expresses concern for my well-being.
- My manager checks in about how I am coping with work demands.

Technological facilitation

- I have reliable access to the tools I need to do my job remotely.
- IT support resolves technical issues promptly.

Outcomes (short)

- I feel engaged at work.
- I can complete my tasks effectively.
- I have experienced increased stress related to my work in the past month. (reverse scored)

Analysis Plan

1. Descriptives: means, SDs, and internal consistency (Cronbach's α) for each scale. 2. Construct validity: conduct exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to confirm that the four support dimensions load as expected (pilot sample permitting). 3. Regression models: run multiple regressions predicting (a) task performance (supervisor-rated or self-rated proxy) from communication and task guidance, controlling for demographics; (b) psychological safety/well-being from socio-emotional support and technological facilitation. 4. Interaction test: include product term of psychological safety \times task guidance to test moderation; probe simple slopes if significant. 5. Power/n size note: for pilot $n=50-100$ expect low power for small effects; report effect sizes and confidence intervals.