

HR CHALLENGES IN THE ERA OF REMOTE LEADERSHIP: BUILDING A STRONG VIRTUAL TEAM

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ABSTRACT

The rapid adoption of remote work systems has transformed organizational management practices, creating challenges in maintaining team effectiveness, coordination, and employee engagement in virtual work environments. Previous studies have primarily examined the direct effects of remote leadership or HR policies on team outcomes, while limited attention has been given to the mediating role of communication effectiveness in explaining how these factors influence team effectiveness, particularly in organizations operating in developing regions. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of remote leadership practices and HR policies and practices on team effectiveness through communication effectiveness in a virtual work environment at PT ABC in Riau. This study employed a quantitative approach using a nonprobability sampling technique involving 90 employees of PT ABC in Riau. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on SmartPLS to examine both direct and indirect relationships among variables. The results indicate that remote leadership practices and HR policies and practices have a positive and significant effect on communication effectiveness and team effectiveness. Furthermore, communication effectiveness significantly mediates the relationship between remote leadership practices, HR policies and practices, and team effectiveness. These findings demonstrate that effective communication serves as a strategic mechanism through which leadership and HR practices enhance team performance in virtual work settings. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of remote leadership practices and HR policies and practices within a single framework, with communication effectiveness positioned as a mediating variable in explaining team effectiveness. The findings provide both theoretical contributions to virtual team management literature and practical implications for organizations seeking to strengthen digital communication, leadership capabilities, and HR systems in the era of digital transformation.

Keywords: Remote Leadership, HR Policies and Practices, Communication Effectiveness, Team Effectiveness, Virtual Work.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technologies and the widespread adoption of remote work arrangements have fundamentally transformed organizational operations and workforce management. While remote work offers flexibility and broader access to talent, it also creates challenges related to team coordination, employee engagement, communication, and performance management (Garro-Abarca, Palos-Sanchez, & Aguayo-Camacho, 2021). Consequently, organizations are increasingly required to develop effective leadership approaches and human resource (HR) practices that can sustain team effectiveness in virtual work environments (Krehl & Büttgen, 2022).

In remote working settings, team effectiveness has become a critical determinant of

organizational success. The ability of virtual teams to collaborate, coordinate tasks, and achieve organizational goals depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on leadership capabilities and organizational support systems (Buljac-Samardzic, Doekhie, & Van Wijngaarden, 2020). Previous studies have identified remote leadership practices and HR policies as important drivers of team effectiveness because they influence employee motivation, trust, commitment, and work performance (Van Beurden, Van de Voorde, & Van Veldhoven, 2021; Hayes, Flower, & Williams, 2021).

However, the growing complexity of remote work suggests that leadership and HR practices alone may not be sufficient to explain the effectiveness of virtual teams. Communication effectiveness has emerged as a crucial factor in

maintaining collaboration, information sharing, and interpersonal relationships among geographically dispersed employees (Brinia et al., 2022). Effective communication enables team members to reduce misunderstandings, strengthen trust, and maintain alignment with organizational objectives despite limited face-to-face interaction (Casado-Aranda, Sánchez-Fernández, & Ibáñez-Zapata, 2023).

Although numerous studies have examined the relationships between remote leadership, HR practices, and team effectiveness, the existing literature presents several limitations. First, most studies focus on the direct effects of leadership or HR practices on team outcomes without exploring the underlying mechanisms through which these effects occur (Greimel, Kanbach, & Chelaru, 2023). Second, communication effectiveness is often treated as a contextual factor rather than as a strategic mediating variable that explains how leadership and HR initiatives contribute to team effectiveness. Third, empirical evidence from developing regions remains limited, particularly in the context of organizations operating in Indonesia and other emerging economies where digital transformation and remote work adoption continue to evolve.

These limitations indicate a significant research gap regarding the mechanism through which remote leadership practices and HR policies influence team effectiveness. Addressing this gap is important because organizations increasingly rely on virtual collaboration and digital communication to achieve organizational objectives.

PT ABC in Riau provides an appropriate context for investigating this issue. The company

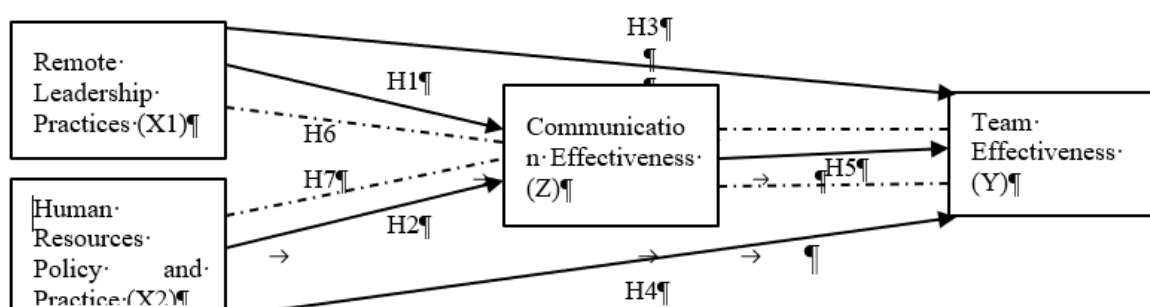
has experienced challenges associated with remote work implementation, including maintaining employee engagement, ensuring effective communication across dispersed teams, adapting leadership approaches, and aligning HR policies with virtual work requirements. These challenges highlight the need to better understand the factors that contribute to team effectiveness in remote work environments.

Research Novelty

The novelty of this study lies in three main aspects. First, it develops an integrated model that simultaneously examines the influence of remote leadership practices and HR policies and practices on team effectiveness. Second, it positions communication effectiveness as a mediating variable, providing a deeper explanation of the mechanism through which leadership and HR practices enhance team effectiveness in virtual environments. Third, the study extends the remote work literature by providing empirical evidence from an organizational context in Riau, Indonesia, a setting that remains underrepresented in previous remote leadership and virtual team studies.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the effects of remote leadership practices and HR policies and practices on team effectiveness through communication effectiveness as a mediating mechanism. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on remote work, leadership, and human resource management while offering practical insights for organizations seeking to improve the effectiveness of virtual teams in the digital era.

The following is the Conceptual Framework:



Gambar 1.1 Conceptual Framework

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

The study employed a quantitative research approach and utilized SmartPLS for data analysis. The population consisted of employees of PT ABC in Riau who were involved in remote or hybrid working arrangements. The sampling technique used was non-probability sampling,

specifically convenience sampling, due to the accessibility and willingness of employees to participate in the study.

The sample size of **90 respondents** was determined based on the recommendation of Hair et al. (2022) for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). According to Hair

et al., the minimum sample size in PLS-SEM can be determined using the **“10-times rule,”** which suggests that the sample size should be at least ten times the maximum number of structural paths directed at a latent construct in the model. In this study, the largest number of structural paths directed toward a single endogenous construct was three, resulting in a minimum requirement of 30 respondents. Therefore, the sample size of 90 respondents exceeded the minimum threshold and was considered sufficient to ensure adequate statistical power and reliable estimation of the structural model.

In addition, Hair et al. (2022) recommend that studies using PLS-SEM generally employ sample sizes ranging from 50 to 100 respondents for models of moderate complexity. Therefore, the sample size used in this study was considered appropriate for hypothesis testing and model evaluation.

Data were collected through structured questionnaires consisting of indicators measuring team effectiveness, remote leadership practices, HR policies and practices, and communication effectiveness. The collected data were subsequently analyzed using SmartPLS to evaluate the measurement model and structural model as well as to test the proposed hypotheses.

Results and Discussion

The Effect of Remote Leadership Practices on Communication Effectiveness

The findings indicate that Remote Leadership Practices significantly influence Communication Effectiveness. This result suggests that leadership plays a critical role in determining how information is exchanged, interpreted, and utilized within virtual teams. In remote working environments, employees rely heavily on digital communication channels; therefore, leaders become central actors in establishing communication norms, ensuring message clarity, and maintaining information flow across geographically dispersed teams.

This finding can be explained through the perspective of **Leadership Theory** and **Media Richness Theory**, which argue that leaders influence organizational communication by selecting appropriate communication channels and facilitating information exchange. Remote leaders who provide timely feedback, encourage open dialogue, and demonstrate responsiveness create a communication climate that reduces uncertainty and enhances mutual understanding among team members.

The result is consistent with the findings of Contreras et al. (2020) and Sjöblom et al. (2022), who reported that remote leadership behaviors

positively affect communication quality and employee engagement in virtual work settings. Therefore, the effectiveness of communication in remote teams is not solely determined by technology availability but also by leadership behaviors that encourage communication transparency and trust.

The Effect of HR Policies and Practices on Communication Effectiveness

The study found that HR Policies and Practices significantly affect Communication Effectiveness. This result indicates that communication quality within virtual teams is influenced not only by leaders but also by organizational systems established through HR management.

From the perspective of the **Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) Theory**, HR practices improve employee capabilities and opportunities to communicate effectively through training programs, communication protocols, and digital collaboration support. Employees who receive adequate guidance and resources are more likely to communicate efficiently and collaborate successfully in remote work environments.

This finding supports the research of Wang et al. (2020) and Van Beurden et al. (2021), which demonstrated that HR policies designed for remote work enhance communication quality and employee coordination. The result suggests that communication effectiveness emerges as an organizational capability that is developed through systematic HR interventions rather than solely through individual effort.

The Effect of Remote Leadership Practices on Team Effectiveness

The findings reveal that Remote Leadership Practices significantly improve Team Effectiveness. This result occurs because virtual teams face challenges associated with physical separation, reduced social interaction, and limited direct supervision. Under such conditions, leadership becomes an essential mechanism for maintaining coordination, motivation, and goal alignment.

According to **Transformational Leadership Theory**, effective leaders inspire employees, create a shared vision, and foster trust, thereby encouraging higher levels of team performance. Remote leaders who demonstrate support, empathy, and clear direction enable team members to remain committed despite working in dispersed locations.

This finding is consistent with Hayes et al. (2021), Kivihuhta (2021), and Greimel et al. (2023), who found that effective virtual leadership positively contributes to team productivity,

collaboration, and adaptability. The result confirms that leadership remains a critical determinant of team success even when organizational interactions occur primarily through digital platforms.

The Effect of HR Policies and Practices on Team Effectiveness

The results indicate that HR Policies and Practices significantly influence Team Effectiveness. This finding suggests that effective team performance is supported by organizational systems that provide employees with adequate resources, clear procedures, and opportunities for development.

The result can be explained using **Social Exchange Theory**, which posits that employees tend to reciprocate organizational support with positive attitudes and higher performance. When organizations implement supportive HR practices, employees perceive greater organizational commitment to their well-being, which enhances engagement and cooperation within teams.

The Effect of Communication Effectiveness on Team Effectiveness

Communication Effectiveness was found to have the strongest direct effect on Team Effectiveness. This finding suggests that communication serves as the primary mechanism through which coordination, collaboration, and trust are established within virtual teams.

The result can be explained through **Information Processing Theory**, which emphasizes that organizations achieve effectiveness when information flows efficiently among members. In remote work settings, communication becomes even more important because face-to-face interactions are limited, increasing the risk of misunderstandings and coordination failures.

This finding is consistent with Brinia et al. (2022), Subramony et al. (2021), and Casado-Aranda et al. (2023), who found that communication quality is a key determinant of virtual team performance. Effective communication enables employees to clarify expectations, resolve conflicts quickly, and coordinate tasks efficiently, thereby enhancing overall team effectiveness.

The Mediating Role of Communication Effectiveness

The results demonstrate that Communication Effectiveness significantly mediates the relationship between Remote Leadership Practices and Team Effectiveness, as well as between HR Policies and Practices and Team Effectiveness. These findings suggest that leadership and HR practices do not improve team effectiveness solely through direct mechanisms;

rather, their influence is partially transmitted through improvements in communication quality.

This finding provides important theoretical implications because it identifies communication effectiveness as an underlying mechanism that explains how organizational practices translate into superior team outcomes. Effective leaders and supportive HR systems create conditions that facilitate information sharing, collaboration, and mutual understanding, which subsequently improve team effectiveness.

This result extends previous studies that primarily examined direct relationships among leadership, HR practices, and team outcomes. The current study demonstrates that communication effectiveness functions as a strategic mediating variable, thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of team effectiveness in virtual work environments. This mediating role constitutes one of the key contributions and novelties of the present research, particularly within the context of remote-working organizations in developing regions such as Riau.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that remote leadership practices and HR policies and practices significantly influence team effectiveness, both directly and indirectly through communication effectiveness within the remote work environment of PT ABC in Riau. The findings confirm that communication effectiveness serves not merely as an operational tool for information exchange but as a strategic mechanism through which leadership and HR practices are translated into improved team performance.

Theoretical Contribution

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the literature on remote work management by integrating remote leadership practices and HR policies and practices within a single framework to explain team effectiveness. More importantly, the study demonstrates the mediating role of communication effectiveness, thereby enriching existing theories of virtual team management. While previous studies have primarily examined direct relationships between leadership, HR practices, and team outcomes, this research reveals the underlying mechanism through which these organizational factors contribute to team effectiveness in virtual settings. The findings therefore offer a more comprehensive understanding of how communication acts as a critical linking process in digital work environments.

Practical Contribution

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that organizations cannot rely solely on leadership capabilities or HR policies to improve team effectiveness. Instead, organizations must ensure that both elements are supported by effective communication systems. For PT ABC and similar organizations implementing remote work arrangements, investments in digital communication infrastructure, virtual leadership development programs, and communication competency training are essential to strengthening collaboration, trust, and coordination among geographically dispersed employees.

Furthermore, HR departments should design policies that facilitate transparent communication, employee engagement, and continuous feedback mechanisms. Such initiatives will help organizations create more adaptive, resilient, and productive virtual teams capable of responding effectively to the challenges of digital transformation.

Implications and Future Research

This study highlights communication effectiveness as a strategic organizational capability that enhances the impact of leadership and HR practices on team effectiveness. Future studies may extend this model by incorporating additional variables such as digital trust, employee engagement, organizational culture, technology readiness, or psychological well-being. Comparative studies across industries, regions, or countries would also provide broader insights into the effectiveness of remote work management practices under different organizational and cultural contexts.

In conclusion, the study contributes to both theory and practice by demonstrating that effective communication is a key mechanism for transforming leadership and HR initiatives into superior team performance, thereby supporting organizational sustainability and competitiveness in an increasingly digital workplace.

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