

REIMAGINING LEADERSHIP IN THE ERA OF POWER BALANCE: HOW AN
EMPOWERED WORKFORCE IS SHIFTING TRADITIONAL DYNAMICS.

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Dedication

I would like to thank my husband, whose love and support made this journey possible.

I would also like to dedicate this work to the loving memory of my mom.

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I extend my heartfelt appreciation to Professor Velimir Srića for his supervision, encouragements, and valuable insights. They have been a true source of inspiration.

ABSTRACT

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This research originates from a critical reflection on the evolving power dynamics between leaders and employees in the digital era. Employees today are increasingly equipped with advanced knowledge, direct access to information, and digital tools. They also have an amplified online visibility, which turns their voice into impact. These capabilities challenge traditional pyramidal organizations that consider employees as followers of decisions.

Moreover, statistics and global trends indicate that employees are displaying a global low engagement in their jobs. Macro phenomena such as the rise in freelancing and entrepreneurial aspirations, and post-pandemic trends like the “Great Resignation,” push to reconsider the value proposition of traditional employment. These trends indicate a shift in employees’ values towards autonomy, flexibility, and purpose. The extensive existing literature on leadership considers employee empowerment as an outcome of effective leadership and organizational culture. It rarely treats it as an observable fact. As

business landscape is transforming, companies should adapt to avoid stagnation, reduced innovation, loss of young talent, and employee disengagement.

To address this gap, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach to explore Power Balance. This perspective does not present shared leadership as an HR strategy; rather, it recognizes it as an observable element of modern landscape. It reflects a reality in which autonomous, informed, visible and capable employees can influence organizational outcomes regardless of formal rank. This thesis proposes a more comprehensive and even understanding of influence in the digital age.

To deepen the exploration of this concept, insights from secondary data were collected, complemented by a survey composed of 14 Likert-scale statements and one qualitative question, sent to 205 voluntary participants working for the UK private sector.

The results ultimately indicated ambiguous feelings towards power balance. Although the gap between leadership and employees is narrower, balance is not reached yet, but technological advancements suggest progress. Employees recognize their newly earned powers but still have difficulties in considering their influence on par with leadership's. This indicates that technology alone is not sufficient; there is a deep cultural change that ought to be made, and effective leadership strategies must be implemented to foster mutual recognition of power.

‘Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything,
but because **it comes from everywhere’.**

(Michel Foucault)

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Leadership. A subject that continues to fuel passion among scholars and a topic of endless debates. Theories around leadership can be found as early as 300 BC, in India's ancient and insightful texts, where Katulya (an Indian prime minister, also known as Chanakya), already addressed Responsible and Responsive leadership (Vijayakumar, 2017). Whether in religion, legends, or mythology, leaders are some heroic beings whose calling is to protect and save their people from approaching death or destruction (Saint-Michel, 2023). In families, the leader is the provider, the protector, and a figure of both authority and care. Just as for families, a company's success requires a visionary's guidance and supervision (Dare, 2022). In fact, in the business world, effective leadership plays a crucial role in aligning employees' efforts around a shared vision, fostering a collective sense of purpose, and inspiring individuals to work towards a common goal (Beato, 2023).

The legitimacy of a leader, as conceptualized by Max Webber during the industrial revolution, relies on the approval of the followers to be led (Sahni, 2025). He identified a tripartite repartition of authority:

- 1- Traditional leadership style is an influence that is inherited (for example, in family businesses)
- 2- Charismatic leadership style, which is the ability to convey a vision and inspire others
- 3- Bureaucratic leadership style, that is more structured and hierarchical as typically seen in large corporations or government bodies (Sahni, 2025).

Over time, a wide range of theories and approaches have emerged, going from 19th century early models built around natural traits of a leader, such as the “Great Men Theory” that implies that only particular highly intelligent and heroic individuals have an innate talent to lead (Cherry, 2023), to Behavioral Theories in mid-20th century that underlined the behaviors of leaders in certain situations. However, the modern perspective on leadership emphasizes the ability to empower and to inspire (Campbell, 2024). Former CEO of GE, Jack Welch, considered a legendary leader and strategy specialist, stated that effective business leaders create a vision, articulate a vision, and own the vision in a passionate way (Tsai, 2023).

In fact, the 21st century urges for a fundamental redefinition of leadership as it offers a completely different landscape. One that Katulya himself, could never have imagined. An evolving landscape marked by the striking entrance of artificial intelligence, digital transformation, remote work, globalization, and massive flow of information. In order to sustain in this highly dynamic environment, companies need to be guided by leaders who are flexible, visionaries, and who are able to pave the way for innovations (Global Gurus, 2025). These technological changes not only have disrupted daily operational tasks but also altered traditional power dynamics between leadership and followership. In fact, the internet and digital technologies present today massive opportunities for self-development. In the year 2000, Goffee and Jones (2000) already stated that it was difficult to find followers who are willing to follow in times where there are so many advice and books encouraging people to lead. 25 years later, the legitimacy of a leader, based on knowledge and skills ought more than ever to be redefined, as these are now available to all individuals who want them.

“Change or die”, this is what Deutschman (2007) advised to do. Just as technological innovation and continuous improvement are mandatory to develop in this

rapidly evolving environment (Yan, 2023), so is the relationship between followership and leadership.

Similarly to leaders, who historically were the ones to play the central role in the shaping of an organization's identity, employees too, have transformed. Globally, low employee engagement is estimated to have resulted in \$438 billion in lost productivity (Harter and Pendell, 2025). In fact, employees' expectations and ambitions are changing. After covid-19, they are searching for purpose as they were forced to reevaluate their priorities (Turner, 2023). According to Lockhart (2023), leaders wrongly believe that young employees are not willing to work hard, whereas in reality, younger generations are searching for environments fostering respect and values. They do not wish to repeat the same patterns that led to their peers' burnouts (Lockhart, 2023).

The "Great Resignation" trend that followed the pandemic showed that individuals are more and more attracted to freelancing as alternatives to regular jobs (Serenko, 2023). This opens the door to believing that employees are in search of optimized use of their time, knowledge and skills. They no longer wish to be passive spectators and executors, rather, they have the means, the skills and the knowledge to be active actors in the shaping of a company's policy and decision making. They can challenge, co-create and use their voice to actively influence company policy.

1.2 Research Problem

Traditionally, organizational hierarchies are like a pyramid, with the most influential individual at the top and regular employees at the bottom (Ellis, 2023). However, the rise of digital technologies and easy access to information have fundamentally disrupted traditional organizational power structures. Typical structures are no longer efficient in more knowledgeable economies (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). In this relatively new landscape, leadership is no longer reserved to individuals in positions of

authority but rather, it involves guiding empowered and knowledgeable individuals. In other words, leadership in terms of knowledge, vision and values is democratized. So, in such a context, what defines a leader? Is it someone with superior intelligence or with outstanding charisma? Is it, on the contrary, the most humble and empathic person in a group? In an era where inspiration and influence are everywhere, where opportunities to learn are abundant and where AI is capable to fill up any shortage in skills, there is a need to modernize famous Harvard question “Why should anyone be led by you?” (Goffee and Jones, 2000). Rather it should become “What is so unique in your leadership style that you can inspire and lead, people who can equally inspire and lead?”. Ultimately, this doctoral research seeks to contribute to this contemporary and complex question.

In regard to structures, as information becomes democratized across organizations, professionals witness the rise of flatter forms of organizations. They are characterized by distributed authority, the elimination of numerous managerial levels and reciprocated trust and loyalty (Jones, 2025). This shift presents a critical challenge: Organizations who have not yet adopted new leadership styles and who are attached to control and centralized decision-making, may no longer reflect the realities of modern knowledge-based work environments. This study aims to understand how employees’ newly earned power and influence are reflected in the current transformed settings. In fact, this understanding is essential to companies to develop effective strategies that are humble and coherent with the bottom-up shift of power.

1.3 Purpose of Research

This mixed-method study aims at providing a realistic view of today’s expectations regarding leadership and how the latter should adapt to the new aspirations and skills of their employees. The research will lean on the wealth of available data and the invaluable work of different scholars from different credible sources. Also, it will

conduct a quantitative and qualitative survey among more than 205 participants in the UK. Collaborating on this matter with a French statistics company, ensures that the collection and retention of information align perfectly with GDPR compliance requirements.

Regarding the collection of secondary data, articles online were selected based on the reputation and history of the site (number of citations, academic journals, or websites with a significant number of articles in business with a clear contact section). The study relies on relatively recent information written in a qualitative corporate style. This approach is the appropriate method to collect different information and cross analyze them to come up with a new vision from existing work (Valcheva, n.d). The research will explore current employment and organizational trends and develop the perception of power sharing in the business world. To gain a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the importance of employee empowerment for sustainability, the study will provide examples of government initiatives. The rationale behind this choice is to present governmental actions as another leverage supporting employee empowerment; it is not only limited to companies, but it has become a governmental concern. This research aims to explore new balance of power settings in the current business landscape. Specifically, it aims to assess whether employees are now as empowered as their leaders, based on their skills, knowledge, and access to necessary resources.

The results of this survey and this research will help identify whether there is a balance (or concentration) of power between leaders and their employees. It will also propose new KPIs to evaluate the level of empowerment of individuals within an organization. Supporting employees and taking into consideration their skills could become a competitive advantage to any company searching to attract and retain talents.

1.4 Significance of the study

This mixed-methods study using primary and secondary data is of significant importance. Today's rapidly evolving work environment due to digital transformation is increasingly redefining organizations and impacting employee engagement through the facilitation of their daily tasks (Grosum, 2025). The growing adoption of digital tools and platforms presents both opportunities and challenges for employees and employers alike. By exploring employee empowerment in the digital era, this thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital transformation offers a new leverage for employees to be powerful and gain a once top-down leadership authority.

In particular, the study's significance lies in its potential to provide insights into how organizations can optimize the use of digital tools to promote a more empowered, engaged, and motivated workforce. Hoping to provide the necessary proposition of value, companies can encourage employees to stay fulfilled and perform in their regular jobs. As businesses slowly shift toward more decentralized (Forsdik, 2021), flexible, and technology-driven work environments and taking into consideration contemporary concepts such as mental health and work/life balance (Smith, 2024), examining the dynamics of employee empowerment becomes crucial for fostering a productive and innovative workforce. In order to sustain in a VUCA world, companies need proactive, innovative and committed employees (Decisionwise, n.d). Leadership must take into consideration that times have changed and making the best use of employees' skills and power, ultimately contributes to improved organizational performance and overall well-being.

Furthermore, the findings of this study will offer valuable guidance for leaders, HR managers, managers, NGOs & CSR professionals. The research will explore what the current needs and expectations of young generations are and what it takes to recruit and

retain young talents. By identifying the impacts of digital tools on empowerment, the study can inform best practices and come up with new KPIs that help businesses balance technological advancement with employee satisfaction. Level of empowerment and leaders' acceptance of employees' modern power, could become a competitive advantage and contribute to employer brand.

The research is also highly significant in the context of the growing trend of entrepreneurship, and freelance (mellow, n.d). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital technologies (Battisti et al., 2022) allowing employees to work from anywhere. This research will shed light on how remote and flexible work environments, supported by digital tools, can either promote or inhibit employee empowerment.

While there is significant research on the effects of technology on daily work, there is limited exploration of how digital transformation and employee empowerment interconnect in the digital age. By exploring primary and secondary data, this study will synthesize existing research on these topics offering a comprehensive overview of current trends and contribute to the business field by providing new data.

In addition, the study will also be beneficial to governmental bodies and business leaders looking to develop strategies that align digital transformation with the empowerment of their workforce. With the increasing focus on creating working environment favorable for employee's wellbeing, understanding how to use digital tools effectively to empower employees will be an asset for organizations striving to improve employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention.

In conclusion, the importance of this research lies in its ability to contribute significant input to both theory and practice. It will provide a holistic understanding of the complex relationship between digital tools and employee empowerment, ultimately helping organizations create more effective and supportive workplaces in the digital age.

1.5 Research Purpose and Questions

The rapid evolution of technology and digital transformation has significantly reshaped the modern workplace, introducing new dynamics that influence the way employees engage with their organizations. According to Vargas Llave (2023), “the digital revolution can be defined as a general acceleration in the pace of technological change in the economy, driven by a massive expansion of our capacity to store, process and communicate information using electronic devices”. He further argues that these technologies enable employees to access information anytime and anywhere, providing a high level of flexibility.

This thesis will explore the presence of power balance in the digital era, using both primary and secondary data to analyze how technological advancements, AI, digital tools, and social media platforms, have impacted employees’ empowerment.

The purpose of this research is to understand how the above-mentioned technological tools and platforms influence employees' autonomy, job satisfaction, and decision-making capabilities within organizations. With the increasing presence of digital tools in the workplace, employees are encouraged to have a larger space to work independently, access information, and communicate efficiently. However, while these advancements have the potential to enhance employee empowerment, there is a limitation to the amount of power employee can reach. Leadership in the end is a mindset and motivation (West, 2024). There will always be the need for a frontrunner, especially with the introduction of hybrid work. Leaders ensure that everybody is going in the same direction in a company (Greer and Klotz, 2020). This is why this research is built around power balance and not “shift of power”.

On the opposite side of empowerment reside the challenges faced by unskillful or less qualified employees who have trouble following up on technological advancements

and resist digital transformation (Cieslak and Valor, 2024). This type of workforce can experience a decreased work-life balance and risk disempowerment.

Through the use of credible secondary data, this research will study a variety of scholarly articles, interviews, reports, case studies, and industry analysis to assess the relationship between digital transformation and employee empowerment. The secondary data will include studies on organizational behavior, key theories, digital workplace trends, employee engagement surveys, and reports from reliable sources such as consulting firms and industry experts. It will also collect primary data through quantitative and qualitative surveys addressed to a population of 205 leaders and employees from the private sector in the UK. By synthesizing existing literature and findings and by analyzing specific data around this topic, the research will address the key questions below:

Research Question 1

How does the digital era promote employee empowerment in current organizational settings?

The following sub-research questions were asked to further clarify the scope of the study:

Sub-Research Question 1

What are the main digital advancements that promote employee empowerment?

Sub-Research Question 2

How is empowerment reflected in the reality of everyday corporate life?

In summary, this chapter highlighted the *raison d'être* of this study, the problem addressed, the purpose, along with the contribution to the business society. The chapter ended with key questions that ought to be answered in the following pages.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The topic of leadership has proven itself to be a subject of interest for both scholars and business professionals. It is practically impossible to estimate the number of studies and publications contributing to the field. Amazon alone offers 57,136 books with the word ‘leadership’ in the title (Iaroni, 2015). Over the years, researchers and practitioners have reached an understanding that leadership is a continuously evolving process, with each new study building on previous findings rather than completely disregarding them (Khan, Nawaz and Khan, 2016).

Employee engagement is also a topic of attention to many professionals. It describes the level of interest and eagerness an individual has towards his job (Smith, 2024). Leaders, make sure that engagement and inclusion are embedded in the company's core values and operational strategies, positioning them as essential to the organization's success (Smith, 2025). According to Witt (2023), ensuring employee engagement does not simply add benefits to a company but is essential to its productivity.

Empowerment of employees is another task attached to leaders; this goes beyond the assignation of tasks to reach trusting employees to take the right decisions on their own (2025).

However, the digital era has initiated a considerable transformation in organizations, thus in the position of leadership. It reshaped companies’ operations and introduced innovative tools to the business environment. As noted by Kouzes and Posner (2017), “For Brian Alink, the digital revolution is as profound as the Industrial Revolution”. In fact, employees gained a new power induced by autonomy, knowledge and skills.

To understand the gap in literature in terms of empowerment as a fact coming from employees and not from leaders, this literature review was conducted on online databases and search engines to come up with the relevant information. Although it would not be possible to exhaustively collect all principles related to leadership and impacts of digitalization, the main principles were mostly found on the following online search engines: EBSCOhost, Jstor, Google Scholar, ResearchGate and Google. To retrieve relevant articles, a set of specific keywords was employed across the previously mentioned online databases and search platforms. Mainly: *digital transformation, digital tools, leadership theories, employment trends, employeeship meaning, modern organizational trends, power theories, and impact of COVID-19 on organizations and employee empowerment, government initiatives for employee empowerment etc...* Relevant studies were identified by using individual keywords as well as combinations of terms. Only noteworthy articles from trustworthy sources were included in this literature review. They were all screened according to pertinence and date. The majority of the studies included in the literature review were published between 2016 and 2025. There is a special importance accorded to articles written after COVID-19 that is, as mentioned before, one of the most important accelerators of Digital Transformation. In order to have a clearer view on the history of leadership and to highlight the evolution of the concept, some articles from earlier periods were included.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a structured model that describes the main variables, their relationships, and the theoretical basis of a study (Hassan, 2025). It guides the research process and gives an enlightened view of the subject of research and its limitations (Hassan, 2025). The first step into drafting an efficient conceptual framework is to identify the research problem. In this case, it is the effect of access to information,

access to knowledge, access to digital tools and access to social media on power balance between leaders and their followers. Then, it is important to proceed to a thorough literature review, to rely on the invaluable work of previous scholars to identify trends, theories and key variables. The third step consists of establishing relationships between these variables, meaning the effect of the different variables on each other (Hassan, 2025).

The conceptual framework presented below, consists in mapping out the key variables and mechanisms that contribute to power balance, and to explain how leadership is being redefined in a workforce characterized by informed, capable, and increasingly independent individuals.

At the heart of this conceptual framework are four independent variables:

- 1- Access to knowledge through online education (courses, studies, webinars, tutorials...)
- 2- Access to information through the massive flow of data from both inside and outside the company
- 3- Access to digital tools that promote employees' autonomy and reduce their need for supervision
- 4- Use of social media can present interesting platforms for employees to voice concerns, express satisfaction, build networks or interact publicly with leadership.

This study aims to examine whether these four variables are the main drivers that facilitate the emergence of Power Balance within organizations.

Access to knowledge refers in this context to both external access to educational opportunities and professional development initiated voluntarily by employees. It is important to mention that even governments are in favor of employee empowerment through education. In fact, UN advocates for worldwide access to the internet by 2030

(Muhlungu, 2022). The rationale behind this example is to show that as the world is becoming a digitally connected one, employees are no longer reliant on management to mediate knowledge. Through the internet, online learning platforms, and transparent organizational systems, employees can now acquire the same knowledge and insights once limited to leadership. To further explain the impact of digital education, it is important to mention that, in 2025, up to 49% of students in the world had completed a kind of online training (Peck, 2025). This increased access challenges the traditional notion of power as knowledge-based exclusivity, making it possible for employees to engage in meaningful contributions across all levels of the organization.

Even though there is a thin line between knowledge and information, this research will consider them two independent variables as information is an ongoing flow coming from different channels. It can refer to online data, raw facts, or professional information acquired through the use of digital tools (CRM, Power BI, SharePoint...). As for knowledge, it is about acquiring extensive understanding of a subject through education & experience (ClearPeople, 2025).

Access to digital tools captures here the ability of employees to work independently, communicate effectively with different teams, and contribute to the organization's success without managerial intervention thanks to technology. This autonomy driven by digital tools, further supports power balance, by providing employees with platforms that facilitate their daily work and enhance their productivity. Digital tools for project management, HR management, internal communication, data analysis and AI, allow teams to operate with a level of independence that previously required managerial supervision. As a result, decision-making is decentralized, and employee initiative is encouraged. Moreover, decision-making can be faster and more

reliable because it is based on reliable facts. This technological foundation further expends the effects of access to information on the distribution of authority.

Access to social media, on the other hand, gives more weight to employees' concerns and opinions as it grants them direct access to their leaders, when in the real world, they have to go through multiple managerial levels and will rarely be able to reach them. This increased connectivity fosters dialogue and provides an opportunity for employees to share expertise, build networks, share knowledge and often times position themselves as emerging leaders themselves. It also grants them power on company reputation. For example, Quit-tok trend is a viral trend where employees posted videos detailing their resignations and reasons behind quitting their jobs. It had a significant impact on empowerment of employees through solidarity and validation (Mi-Say, 2025). Employers have no control over online trends and such videos can expose toxic workplace environments and hinder brand reputation (Mi-Say, 2025).

These four independent variables operate through a key mediating variable: Employee Empowerment. A mediator variable indicates how the independent variable and the dependent variable are related (Statisticshowto, n.d). Empowerment is the outcome of evolving employees' skills, autonomous work, responsibility and exposure. Empowerment is not merely the result of motivational policies coming from leaders, trained managers and experts in HR but comes from within employees when granted the tools, the knowledge, and freedom to make decisions. In this context, empowerment is the mechanism through which access to knowledge, to education, to social media and use of digital tools, translate into changes in workplace dynamics.

Another crucial moderating factor is organizational culture. A moderating factor is an element that can modify the relationship between dependent and independent variables (Heffner, 2017). Taking the fact that employees have enormous access to

information outside of their organization, organizational culture cannot suppress skills earned independently by them. Nevertheless, it can determine whether an organization embraces or resists decentralization and empowerment. Even with the availability of knowledge and tools, a culture grounded in control, secrecy, or rigid hierarchy can limit power redistribution. Such policies, risk loss of talents to competition who embraced changed. Equally, organizations that value transparency, open collaboration, and shared leadership, embrace and reinforce the effects of empowerment, enabling new leadership dynamics to flourish.

As empowerment grows and culture becomes more inclusive, a new pattern of authority distribution begins to emerge. This is not a top-down policy coming from a leader, but a dynamic that arises organically as empowered employees begin to act independently, challenge, offer valuable input, and are encouraged to drive initiatives. In this context, managers will naturally take alignment and coordinating roles rather than enforcing control and supervision. Authority thus will naturally flow toward individuals who have the relevant knowledge, courage and initiative rather than being confined to formal positions at the top of the pyramid. In this model, authority distribution is not an independent variable but a result, an outcome. It is the immediate effect of a deeper shift in how people work, how people think, how they communicate, and how they have power.

There is an external and contextual variable that influences how strongly these relationships interact. It is the generational attitude towards work. In fact, views around work, differ from one generation to another. Younger generations, particularly millennials and Gen Z, often value autonomy, flexibility, and participative work environments. Their expectations, environment and aspirations make them more

receptive to non-hierarchical leadership structures and more likely to naturally embrace power balance.

Ultimately, the emergence of distribution of authority contributes to several important outcomes, that will be a pillar for a company's development in a VUCA world: Innovation, talent retention, employee engagement, leadership effectiveness and ultimately customer satisfaction.

Frank Herbert's famous notion is that bureaucracy kills innovation (What's the PONT, 2024). In the context of power balance, innovation is encouraged when employees, who are the ones who are the most aware of their needs, have enough impact to come up with ideas and make them happen.

Leadership effectiveness improves, as leadership becomes more coherent with the realities of a knowledgeable and skilled workforce. In this model, effective leadership is not about command but about enabling and guiding others who also possess leadership potential.

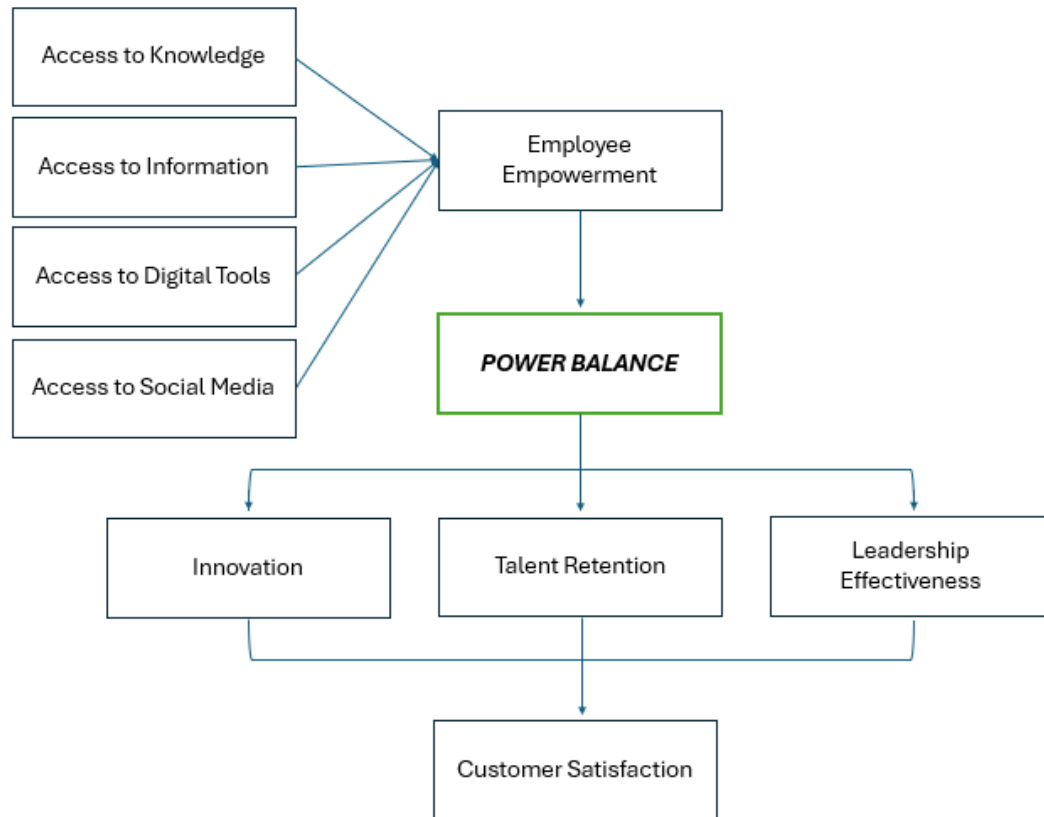
Employee engagement rises when individuals feel informed, trusted, and heard. When their daily work is not spoiled by unnecessary games of power and authority claims. Empowered employees are more likely to find meaning in their work, identify with the organization's goals, and remain committed. "We always do best when we consistently live what we believe" (Srića and Kaufman, 2020, p. 6, chap. 3). For this matter, engagement is sustained not through supervision, but through a sense of autonomy, contribution, and shared values and leadership. According to Kumar and Kumar (2017), employee empowerment brings motivation and a sense of satisfaction towards their companies.

Talent retention is positively influenced by the presence of power balance. Today's workforce, especially younger generations, seek environments that offer growth,

recognition, and the freedom to express oneself, regardless of rank. When organizations align leadership models with these expectations by embracing equal power, providing transparency and enabling skill development, they significantly reduce turnover and attract high-caliber professionals who are looking for purpose, not mere employment.

The result of all these positive outcomes is customer satisfaction. Studies indicate that qualitative feelings employees have towards their jobs are reflected in customer happiness (Carter, n.d.). Ultimately, customer satisfaction is a pillar for a company's sustainability (Franklin, 2025).

In conclusion, the conceptual framework used in this research aimed at highlighting the factors that enhance power balance within an organization. A shared authority that will ultimately have cost-saving benefits associated with talent retention, innovation and customer satisfaction. A schematic representation of the conceptual framework is shown in Figure 2.1. It portrays the interconnection of different variables that could lead to balance of power between leaders and followers.



Moderating variable => Company Culture (Enhances or limits empowerment)
Mediating variable => Generational attitude (affects relationship to work)

Figure 2.1 Conceptual framework of Power Balance in the Digital Era

2.2 Key Theories of Leadership

Leadership has been studied since early 20th century; it has evolved from focusing on distinctive traits of a leader to examining his behavior. Throughout history, concepts and theories grew as follows (WeValgo, no date):

- 1- **Trait Leadership Theory:** In the early 20th century, this concept assumed that some people had natural inclinations to be leaders.

- 2- **Behavioral Leadership Theory:** In the 1930s, researchers began to focus on behaviors of leaders in certain situations (task-oriented style and people-oriented style). This theory was specially studied by Lewin.
- 3- **Situational Leadership Theory:** Developed by Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard in the 1960s, this theory indicated that the best leadership is the one adopted in coherence with the situation and the maturity level of followers.
- 4- **Contingency Leadership Theory:** Developed by Fred Fiedler in the 1960s who suggested that task-oriented leaders are more efficient when leaders and their subordinates' relations are outlined in a clear way.
- 5- **Managerial Grid Theory:** Developed by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton in 1960s, this theory presents the fact that the most effective leadership style arises when concerns for people and concerns for production are balanced.
- 6- **Transformational Leadership Theory:** Developed by James Downton and Bernard Bass in the 1980s, this theory proclaims that this type of leaders inspire their subordinates to go past their personal benefits and work for the benefit of the organization in global.
- 7- **Transactional leadership Theory:** Developed by Marx Weber in the early 20th century, this theory was diffused by Bass in 1980s. It stipulates that leaders grant rewards or punish subordinates based on their performance.
- 8- **Servant Leadership Theory:** Developed by Robert Greenleaf in 1970s, this theory puts the leader at the service of others and places the needs of the workers before the organizations.
- 9- **Authentic Leadership Theory:** This theory was developed in the late 2000s mainly by Bill George. It argues that effective leadership comes with experience and

knowledge of oneself. Authentic leaders abide by their own core values and have a rather transparent leadership.

As for current leadership theories, they underline the importance of relational aspect of leadership and are centered towards ethics, inspiration and motivation (Aurora Training Advantage, n.d.). They are listed as follows (Aurora Training Advantage, n.d) :

- 1- **Transformational Leadership Theory:** This theory implies that leaders encourage employees to reach higher levels of performance through conveying vision, empowerment and innovations.
- 2- **Transactional Leadership Theory:** Transactional leaders follow up closely on performance. They are keen on using incentives and retribution as motivation levers.
- 3- **Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory:** LMX theory suggests that leaders foster a positive relationship with their followers which can positively impact motivation, engagement and performance.
- 4- **Adaptive Leadership Theory:** Adaptive leadership is used in challenging or changing environments. It indicates that leaders assist their followers in adapting to change and finding ways to perform in such challenging environment.
- 5- **Authentic Leadership Theory:** Authentic leaders show integrity, transparency, and good morals. Their actions align with their values.
- 6- **Empowering leadership:** Delegating authority, asking for input, enabling autonomous decision-making are factors that contribute to employees view of an empowering leader (Bishop, 2019).

2.3 Understanding Power in the Workplace

“Power has always been one of those words that everybody uses without necessarily being able to define satisfactorily” (Wrong, 1995). For Foucault, a French

postmodernist, power is not necessarily a negative force but can be a positive force that produces a reality and is a source of social conformity and discipline (Powercube, n.d).

Power appears to have a central role in organizational behavior and leadership theory. It influences how simple and strategic decisions are made, how resources are allocated, and how individuals interact and influence one another within the workplace. It also affects leadership dynamics, employee performance, and organizational culture. In the context of a business organization, power is defined by the ability held by a person (A) to influence the behavior of another person (B) in accordance with the desire of the first person (A) (Langton, Robbins & Judge, 2010). Understanding the nature of power, its sources, and its implications is essential for fostering effective leadership, employee empowerment, and organizational performance. French and Raven depicted 6 sources of leadership power (World of Work, 2019):

- 1- **Coercive Power:** It is about forcing someone to act in a certain way against their will. This type of power induces negative sentiment and pushes employees to leave if used excessively.
- 2- **Reward Power:** It is based on the capacity to grant rewards for people after they accomplish a certain task. It does not necessarily have to be financial but can also be a simple “thank you”. The power of this type of rewards tends to diminish with time.
- 3- **Legitimate Power:** Legitimate power comes for formal and hierarchical rank. Once the rank is lost, it usually means that the power is quickly lost too.
- 4- **Expert Power:** This type of power comes from an individual’s expertise, skills and competence. These qualities make individuals appear trustworthy and give them ability to influence others. This is not linked to formal rank, individuals keep enjoying their expert power as long as they have good results.

5- Referent Power: Referent power appears when a person is liked and respected as a person. It is not linked to formal rank but in general, referent power alone, is not very impacting in a workplace environment.

6- Informational Power: This power can be strong in the modern workplace as it is the ability to control flow of information or to access confidential information, needed to attain a certain target.

In 1970s, Kanter described the conditions to empower employees as follows: Giving them opportunities for advancement, Access to information, Access to support, Access to resources, formal power and informal power (Structural Empowerment, no date). These elements were considered essential conditions for companies to guarantee employee satisfaction and organizational success (Structural Empowerment, no date). However, in the current work environment, this framework may be viewed as increasingly outdated. In fact, with the rise of remote work, digital communication tools, social media and decentralized organizational structures, employees have the means and the knowledge to access information, build networks inside and outside a company, and create opportunities independently. As such, empowerment is no longer solely dependent on leadership initiative or company culture, but it leans on individual ambition and technological access.

Power in the workplace as a concept, is evolving at the same pace as leadership and employee empowerment. From classical theories to contemporary ideas, researchers have explored how power is acquired, how it is maintained and how it is used. While power can be seen in a negative way, it can also foster efficiency and drive performance, if it is used well.

This research will explore the new face of power, one that is not only traditionally held and exercised by formal leaders, but also as it is emerging from employees through

new forms of influence. By examining these evolving dynamics, the study aims to pave the way for future analyses that reconsider how power is distributed among organizations and how it is exerted across organizational levels.

2.4 The rise of Cyber Leaders

By January 2009, Facebook included over 175 million users, YouTube witnessed 10 hours of content uploaded every minute, and Flickr hosted more than 3 billion images, showing the immense growth of online platforms (Liu et al., 2021). According to a 2023 report by Influential Executive, 73% of CEOs from the Fortune 500 list are active on at least one social media platform (Neal, 2024). In fact, social media serves as a powerful platform for exploring how leaders connect with others and how they use their authority within and outside their organizations (Smith, 2016). This new proximity transformed people's views on leadership. The mysterious and far from being reached leadership figure, became obsolete. Being connected, with transparent and direct leadership is now important for digital reputation and necessary to retain young top talents (Brunswick Group, 2021). A digital reputation is shaped by all online actions along with content other individuals share about a specific person (eSafety Commissionner, 2024). As per Nikita Pokhorov (2023), leaving a digital footprint is essential, as it boosts customer loyalty and employee engagement.

Traditionally, leaders influence employees' innovative performance both through their actions as well as by their more general daily behavior (de Jong and Den Hartog, 2007). However, in the present context, cyber space has given employees other sources of inspiration. Ironically, Instagram counted more than 64 million “influencers” in 2023, willing to influence and inspire consumer behavior and driving social change (TrendHero, 2023). Some are key leaders, others have no real qualifications, but all have large influence (TrendHero, 2023).

In the end, it is necessary to mention that the online world has not only opened its doors to leaders to lead and exert their influence but also, allowed employees to exert influence and take leadership roles in shifting public opinion, sharing expertise and gaining exposure.

2.5. Social Media as Power Equalizer

In today's digitally connected world, the traditional boundaries between leaders and employees are increasingly blurred. One of the main initiators behind this shift is the extensive use of social media and digital communication platforms. Historically, leaders were the ones to hold the voice and authority, while employees operated within the framework defined for them. However, social media has disrupted this dynamic by equalizing access to visibility, voice, and influence.

For leaders, social media offers new avenues for exposure, presence, and engagement. In 2022, 97% of Fortune 500 CEOs were on LinkedIn (Conner, 2024). Platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and even TikTok provide opportunities for executives to communicate about their roles, promote company culture, and shape public opinion in some cases. In doing so, leadership becomes authentic and visible not only to internal stakeholders but also to customers, investors, and the general public. This enables leaders to craft their own brand and be seen as true leaders in their industries.

Social media gives audience a sense of transparency and authenticity, bringing leaders to a more relatable figure.

The way social platforms empower employees is equally significant. Social media provides them with a voice that weighs more than traditional internal communication channels. Kellerman (2012, chap. 3 p.5), in her book "The End of Leadership", presents freedom of expression in the 21st century as the "freedom to say anything to anyone, about anything or anyone, anywhere at any time in real time". In fact, employees can now

publicly raise concerns, support, or challenge leadership decisions and company values. In some notable cases, these voices have gone viral on social media and forced organizations to respond. One example is the one of Heather Haynes who posted her layoff video on TikTok that attracted more than 10 Million viewers (Criddle, 2024). In her article, Criddle (2024) informs that such videos are now very popular on social media, as they expose companies' unfair treatments and force management to confront public opinion. Thus, public platforms have become rings where internal arguments can be tracked by external parties, they can shape public opinion and pressure companies to adapt. Employees are using social media as a tool for advocacy and accountability.

As a result, leadership authority is increasingly earned through respect, authenticity, ethical conduct rather than imposed through formal rank. This shift reflects the principle of power balance, where employees, particularly those from younger and more digitally literate generations, are active participants in shaping organizational direction. It is important to reflect on the fact that leaders must now accept a distributed form of influence where employees co-create the company's public identity.

Nevertheless, this empowerment is not without challenges. Worknest (2024) discusses the challenges employers face regarding employees' use of social media during work hours and the implications for workplace productivity and policies. The increased visibility of employee voices may ignite corporate surveillance, reputational risks, and internal conflict. Similarly, leaders face the burden of constant public scrutiny. The mix of personal and professional identities on social platforms can create ambiguity about what constitutes appropriate interactions.

Despite the above pain points, the overall trajectory is pretty clear: power within organizations is no longer held exclusively at the top. It is mediated, partly earned through credibility and is amplified through public approval on digital platforms. Social

media has transformed the act of leadership into a shared action between employees and leaders as they are both participating in shaping communication, values, and legitimacy. Social media is indeed an accelerator of the redefinition of the power dynamics between leaders and employees. It grants leaders visibility through presence on social media, while giving employees the ability to influence public opinion and to confirm leaders' credibility.

2.6 Modern Workforce Education and Its Impact on Employment Dynamics

Even though companies were established in times when physical labor was fundamental, today's workforce is primarily composed of knowledge employees (Srića, 2014).

In fact, Gen Z is the most educated generation until now. Statistics show that 57% of 18 to 21 years old of these native users of technology go to college, compared to 52% of millennials at their age (Annie E. Cassie Foundation, 2021).

Motivated students paired with modern technologies form an ideal combination for enhancing learning (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014). The digital era has revolutionized access to education, it made it more accessible, more flexible and personalized. E-learning for example, evolved from an idea to a phenomenon and tendencies show that this concept is here to stay (Bezhovski and Poorani, 2016). Professionals expect that the number of online learners will rise to 57 million (Aprilaba, 2025) by 2027.

Researchers, including Zieba (2023), highlight the development of new trends post covid-19, such as the "Great Resignation" and "Quiet Quitting", particularly among Generation Z. It would be fair to assume that these young people feel confident and knowledgeable enough to leave an unsuitable position for better opportunities.

In conclusion, the educational background of today's workforce is changing, giving employees more confidence in their quest for a fulfilling job. Thanks to "edtech", future of education looks brighter than ever, as it is less dependent on location (Chen, 2022). Employees' knowledge is becoming sometimes as important or more important than a leader's. Moreover, they have the possibility to be exposed to other leaders' ideas; they can even aspire to become leaders themselves.

2.7 The Role of Technology in Empowering Individuals

Covid-19 pandemic forced businesses to rethink their operations to sustain (Nah and Siau, 2020). It proved that technology can be essential in enhancing business stability and sustainability during crisis (Nah and Siau, 2020). As per the site Descasio (2022), digital tools are online platforms or softwares that facilitate the completion of fastidious tasks. Some researchers, such as (Schilirò, 2021), might argue that although digital transformation offers further opportunities, it might not advantage the workforce market, as some would not have necessary capabilities and skills to adapt. In April 2020, there were 300 million online meetings every day on Zoom, and 280 million on Teams (Krstic, 2024). Moving forward to 2024, the use of communication tools such as Teams and Zoom was so normalized that it made it difficult to believe that people could not adapt and learn how to use new technology.

In this highly digitalized era, it is essential for companies to make audacious investments in technology and in building capabilities to sustain and to increase productivity and cost efficiency (Galvin, LaBerge and Williams, 2021). Among digital tools that improve daily operations, we can mention (Finbite, 2025):

- 1- Project management softwares that are collaborative and ensure an efficient follow up on projects.

- 2- Customer relationship management systems, efficient for customer satisfaction. They positively impact revenues by 30%.
- 3- Online accounting tools, they facilitate financial processes (payrolls, payments, receipts...).

Workplace technology, from cloud platforms to collaborative tools, empowers employees' flexibility and autonomy by enabling access anytime and anywhere, providing intuitive use, and intelligent support that enhances rather than replaces human decision-making (Hacking HR Team, 2024).

It is necessary when evoking the role of technology in empowering individuals to mention that AI is expanding employees' potential (Executive Education, 2024). Instead of replacing humans, AI positions itself as a brilliant associate who, thanks to human guidance, can process time-consuming tasks in a fast and efficient way (Barr, 2024).

Another disruption introduced by the pandemic is remote work enabled by the democratized use of collaborative tools. This aspect also required quick adaptation from employees and their management. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, believes that technology is not yet sophisticated enough to allow innovation remotely (Mollman, 2023). Mollman (2023) indicates in his article that many CEOs join Altman in his conclusion. As per Yang (2023), there are no reliable metrics proving that remote work is unsuccessful and most people criticizing it are the bosses. She adds that it is a "game of power" and that "employees gained too much power by saying no to their working conditions".

In the absence of collaborative tools, daily presence on site was mandatory for all employees. It was often paired with close managerial supervision. In fact, the "crisis-opportunity" offered by COVID-19, has led to a new culture of working in a smarter and more collaborative way (Smith et al., 2020). Not only did this affect efficiency, but this encouraged individual innovation and paved the way to new shapes of teams and

emphasized the importance of knowledge management as a rather competitive advantage (Marion and Fixson, 2020).

2.8 A Generation of Employees Driven by Values

The transformation in employee values and expectations towards work, is not merely a consequence of the pandemic but rather a reflection of broader social, technological, and economic shifts. As employees gained access to technology and information, they became more empowered to make informed decisions about their careers, leading to new patterns of behavior in the workforce. For instance, according to data from Indeed (2024), company history and values now take precedence over salary when employees are choosing a job. This marks a significant departure from traditional models, where compensation was often the primary consideration in decision-making.

The emphasis on company culture and values over salary is representative of a broader shift toward purpose-driven work. Kaufman and Srića (2020) refer to this as a "refolution", a purposeful revolution of consciousness, where employees are motivated by a desire to contribute to something greater than themselves. This movement reflects the growing importance of social responsibility, environmental awareness, and ethical practices in organizational decision-making. Employees are increasingly looking for roles that allow them to align their personal values with the mission and vision of their employers, pushing organizations to rethink their corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Furthermore, mental health awareness has become a primary workplace concern. Companies that prioritize employee wellbeing and mental health are seen as more attractive employers in today's competitive job market. Abbas (n.d.) emphasizes that organizations must pay attention to mental health not just as a necessity for employee happiness, but as a driver of productivity. Employees who feel supported in terms of their

mental and emotional health are more likely to stay engaged, perform well, and contribute positively to the organization's culture.

These shifting expectations have profound implications for leadership dynamics within organizations. In the past, traditional leadership models often relied on centralized control and top-down decision-making to drive performance. However, in today's rapidly evolving environment, such approaches are becoming increasingly ineffective. The importance given to employee autonomy, and the demand for work-life balance have all contributed to a growing preference for leadership that is more collaborative, empathetic, and aligned with employees' personal values.

Leaders are now expected to be facilitators rather than authoritative figures (Razzetti, 2023). Instead of focusing solely on the delivery of results, modern leaders must focus on creating an environment where employees feel supported, valued, and motivated to contribute to the collective success of the organization. This requires a shift from hierarchical form of control to a more participatory model. In these models, leaders act as mentors, facilitators, and role models, encouraging open communication, fostering transparency, and embracing feedback from all levels of the organization.

To better understand the changes, the leaders have to be emotionally intelligent and careful to the wellbeing of their employees. Crawford (2024) emphasizes that emotional intelligence is crucial for leaders to understand, manage, and motivate others effectively. Leaders who recognize the importance of empathy and emotional support are likely to reinforce engagement among their teams (Kellot, 2024). As organizations shift towards a more flexible and employee-centric environment, leaders must be able to navigate these changes with agility, providing clear vision and direction while also respecting employees' need for autonomy and work-life balance.

With the evolution of workplace's culture, organizations face both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, the transition to a more people-focused approach to leadership requires a substantial investment in agile training. This shift challenges well established practices and mindsets, therefore, it requires companies to review and renew their approach to performance management, rewards, and career development opportunities. On the other hand, organizations that embrace these changes are likely to see significant benefits, including higher employee engagement, reduced turnover, and greater innovation.

Moreover, the growing concerns on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability offer organizations an opportunity to attract top talent by aligning with the values that matter most to today's employees (PEG Staffing & Recruiting, 2024). Companies that successfully integrate social responsibility into their operations, products, and services will not only contribute to the greater good but also position themselves as top employers in an increasingly competitive talent market.

In conclusion, post-pandemic fundamental awakening has importantly reshaped workplace culture and leadership dynamics. Employees are no longer willing to accept positions that do not align with their personal values and expectations. The ability to choose is in itself, an expression of power. It has forced organizations to reconsider traditional models of leadership. The rise of employee engagement, work-life balance, mental health awareness, and social responsibility are central to this transformation.

Moving forward, organizations must adopt leadership models that are collaborative, participatory, and values-driven, ensuring that employees' power is respected and that their input is taken into consideration. The future of work will be defined by organizations that can successfully integrate values, purpose and people-

oriented leadership. This way, leaders can ensure creating a workplace environment where both employees and organizations can thrive.

2.9 Governments and NGOs contribution to employee empowerment

In a rapidly transforming global economy, the empowerment of employees has become an international concern for governments and NGOs. As work environments evolve due to technological disruption, changing employee expectations, and global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, both governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are acting to ensure that individuals have the necessary tools to thrive in a VUCA world.

Whether through legislative reforms, entrepreneurial support, leadership training, digital literacy or women empowerment, these institutions are actively shaping a more skilled and resilient workforce. The multiple ways these parties are approaching empowerment help employees acquire greater autonomy, skills and confidence. This opens the door to new opportunities.

One of the most impactful ways governments empower employees is through progressive labor laws and workplace protections. As a prominent example is the European Union's Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions (directive 2019/1152/EU) that obliges employers to be transparent on working conditions including contracts, schedules... (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2019). Similarly, in countries like Canada, recent updates to labor codes address psychological safety, well-being and workplace harassment (Biron, 20219). Such legislative initiatives ensure that employees are not left vulnerable in their workplace.

Additionally, many governments are investing in entrepreneurial support programs that give individuals the tools to shape their own career paths. Initiatives like

the Small Business Administration (SBA) in the United States help individuals create and grow their own business (U.S. Small Business Administration, n.d).

Moreover, the UK government has introduced several reforms, which are described to be the most impacting ones in a generation (Department for Work and Pensions, 2024). These reforms aim to grant every young person access to apprenticeship and quality education, this initiative is called Youth Guarantee. Also, it gives special attention to mental health support.

The UN designated the 21st of April as World Creativity and Innovation Day, to highlight the fact that the modern economy is knowledge-based and that entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity can provide an important step towards achieving sustainable goals (United Nations, n.d).

SkillsFuture Singapore, provide skills level-up programs for mid-career individuals aged 40 and above, who wish to gain new skills and knowledge (SkillsFuture, n.d).

Such initiatives, among many others, do not only impact the economy but also foster innovation and self-leadership, allowing employees to transition into employers or thought leaders in their fields. The result is a cycle of empowerment that benefits society at large.

Education and skills training are essential to empowerment individuals. Digital literacy, for example, is a necessary ability to participate in modern business world (Eden, Chisom and Adeniyi, 2025). This is why governments and NGOs alike are offering large-scale programs to enhance employees' skills and prepare them for a future defined by digital transformation.

Another significant area of focus is leadership development, particularly programs aiming at empowering vulnerable groups within the workforce. NGOs like ILO propose

initiatives such as Ready For Business to assist young men and women to create their own businesses (International Labour Organization, 2025). These programs do not simply give tools to individuals to gain managerial skills; they cultivate leadership mindsets that emphasize collaboration, empathy, and have positive community impact. These are essential attributes in modern organizations. By focusing on value-focused leadership, these efforts go beyond professional skills, they nurture confidence and act for greater good.

Digital tools have also become central to these empowerment strategies. Many NGOs now offer online platforms for employee education, such as webinars. For example, TechSoup, a nonprofit network, provides discounted or free digital tools from renowned brands to nonprofit employees around the world, enhancing their ability to lead and innovate within mission-driven environments (Techsoup, n.d). These digital resources democratize access to knowledge and education. It helps bridge the skill gaps between different regions and socioeconomic groups.

In conclusion, employee empowerment became a primary concern. It is a central pillar of modern workforce development. Whether through legislative reforms, digital training or inclusive leadership programs, governments and NGOs are laying the foundation for an empowered workforce. By equipping employees with the tools, confidence, and opportunities to lead, these efforts not only improve individual lives but also contribute to stronger mindset and foster an innovation driven society. It seems that in a constantly evolving world, empowerment is a strategic facilitator of sustainability.

2.10 Reciprocal feedback

All managers have been taught the importance of giving feedback to their team members (Pacheco, 2025). Traditionally, organizational leadership models have treated feedback primarily as a top-down tool to guide employees' performance, to correct

certain behaviors and motivate their teams. It was a one-way initiative from the hierarchy. Managers gave their opinions in their capacity as the knowledgeable party, and employees received these opinions and acted upon them. This traditional feedback model reinforced existing hierarchies, drawing a clear line on who is holding the authority and who is the one responding to it. But this model no longer fits the reality of modern work.

In contemporary organizations, feedback has evolved into something much more dynamic and democratized. It now moves in both directions. It forms a loop where employees not only receive but also give feedback to their peers, to organizations, and critically, to their leaders. This shift reflects a broader transformation in how power is distributed within the workplace. Whether they are offering suggestions in team meetings, completing engagement surveys, writing reviews on Glassdoor, or using social media to praise or to expose unethical behavior, employees today are far from passive participants. They can directly affect a company's digital reputation, investor confidence and talent attraction.

Thus, there is a disruption on how power operates. Leaders are no longer alone at the top, nor are they far from reach. They are visible, accessible, and increasingly accountable to the people they lead. This is why their followers gained strategic weight.

This equilibrium of power is not necessarily a negative thing for leaders, as they too, benefit from feedback. Reciprocal feedback allows them to align with their team and to adapt their actions to the team's need (Van Haute, 2024). This level of insight is invaluable to adapt leadership. It shifts the role of a leader from being a distant decision-maker to a connected, positive facilitator and active listener of people and ideas. Most importantly, this feedback loop contributes to a more symmetrical distribution of power. Employees don't hold formal authority, but they influence outcomes. Their voice, when organized and amplified, carries real strategic weight. Feedback becomes a form of a soft

power and transforms the employee from a follower into a stakeholder. Since feedback is reciprocal, power is shared. Influence, in today's digital age, is a very powerful tool (Duncan, 2021).

In sum, reciprocal feedback can be a noisy revolution when done in public. It is fundamentally reshaping how leaders use their authority, how employees engage with their professional surroundings, and how power is experienced in the workplace. It supports the transition from rigid authority to dynamic collaboration. For organizations seeking to thrive in a VUCA world, allowing reciprocal feedback enhances employees experience which is a sustainability imperative. Below are examples of companies who promote bidirectional feedback:

A. Google - Project Oxygen

Google's *Project Oxygen* is an initiative that started in 2002. It aimed at proving that managers are not necessary. After the failure of the project in 2002 and 2008, there was a consensus that managers do matter. This is when "Project Oxygen" was launched to understand what are the necessary skills that would make a perfect leader at Google. By analyzing employee feedback and performance metrics, Google identified specific behaviors that are essential for effective leadership. Attributes were for example being a good listener and support professional development (Google, 2025). These insights led to improvement of manager and employee satisfaction.

B. General Electric (GE) - Leadership Assessment Center

General Electric (GE) has enhanced its recruitment process with the implementation of a program that aims to assess the competencies of leadership of its candidates. The Leadership Assessment Center is program that uses simulated real-world business challenges to assess leadership skills (Psico-smart, 2024). As a result of this approach, GE witnessed 30% increase in leadership effectiveness as shown by employee

satisfaction KPIs. Also, internal promotions increased from 40 % to 65% (Psico-smart, 2024).

C. Coca-Cola – 360-Degree Feedback

Coca-Cola's approach towards employee satisfaction is through the use of PerformYard, a platform that allows employees to give different types of annual, quarterly or project-based reviews. This is known as the 360 degree feedback. This initiative links engagement with company performance (Mischke, 2024).

D. Adobe – Check-in System

Adobe's feedback transitioned from annual performance reviews to a continuous feedback system known as *Check-In*. This system ensures regular, data-driven conversations between hundreds of leaders and employees. This endeavor is largely welcomed by employees and improves effectiveness by fostering dialogue and collaboration (Adobe, n.d).

E. Procter & Gamble's (P&G) – “Build from within” initiative

Procter & Gamble has a leadership program named “Build from within”. It aims at tracking the performance of leaders and making sure that leaders are ready for the next level. This way, leaders develop their skills and are promoted from within P&G (Business & Management Case Studies, 2009). They are also inspiring younger talents who recently joined who will one day inspire other younger talents (P&G UK, 2024).

2.11. The Rise of New Organizational Structures

In the rapidly evolving global economy, organizations are increasingly adopting new structural and cultural dynamics in order to innovate and adapt. Rigid chain of commands as seen in traditional hierarchical models and top-down decision-making, are giving way to more flexible, collaborative, and dynamic forms of organization. Among these new trends there are : A) **Flat Organizational Structures** B) **Remote and Hybrid**

Work Structures C) Agile Frameworks D) Employee Empowerment in Purpose-Driven Environment E) Flex Office F) Holacracies. These stand out as transformative approaches to traditional rigid workplace.

A- Flat Organizational Structures

Flat organizations are characterized by the minimization or suppression of middle management layers, resulting in a structure where there are fewer levels between front employees and senior leadership (organimi, 2024). The main aim is to simplify communication, accelerate decision-making, and empower employees by bringing them closer to the core of organizational strategy (organimi, 2024). This model is applied by small to medium enterprises and startups that evolve in rapidly changing environments like technology or software (organimi, 2024).

Example: Video gaming company, **Valve Corporation** has implemented flat organizational structure, meaning that there are no traditional authority role (Möller and McCaffrey, 2021). In the Valve “Handbook for employees”, it is clearly stated that no one reports to anyone else and that even the founder is not the boss (Valve Corporation, 2012). This “boss-less” structure has yet a very powerful performance management system (Eaton Business School, n.d). In fact, while employees decide on which project they wish to work and while they are the ones in charge of gathering resources, there are strict rules such as the “rule of three”, meaning that employees can only start a project if at least three employees agree to collaborate in it (Möller and McCaffrey, 2021). This rule helps select ideas. Also, employees are paid according to their colleagues’ view on their skills and performance (Möller and McCaffrey, 2021). The company’s main goal is to “empower employees” and this atypical organizational system has attracted the most talented individuals from all over the world (Eaton Business School, n.d). One of the most notable initiatives that Valve has implemented to encourage collaboration is that all

desks have wheels to allow employees to work anywhere with anyone (Valve Corporation, p.12). Valve has a deep understanding that when people have been given the necessary autonomy to decide how they will be working, they will be more productive, motivated and loyal (Eaton Business School, n.d). Furthermore, since employees evaluate each other to estimate remuneration, employees will tend to choose 'safe' projects to avoid risks and secure peer's approvals (Möller and McCaffrey, 2021). All these consequences mark the presence of an informal hierarchy and a reported an environment similar to schoolyard with groups and bullying (Möller and McCaffrey, 2021).

Even though this system is an attractive one and Valve enjoys a financial success, critics argue that there will be a tendency for people to collaborate with others based on connections (homophily) (Möller and McCaffrey, 2021). Thus, project selection can be based upon personal reasons rather than profitability (Möller and McCaffrey, 2021).

Example: GitHub a software company in San Francisco, has also implemented a boss-less structure. Similarly to Valve, employees chose the projects they wish to collaborate on and projects would be implemented based on the rule of 2, meaning there should be at least two persons in a team (Burton et al., 2017). The key reason behind this organizational choice is to guarantee the happiness of employees (Burton et al., 2017). However, in 2014, the new CEO brought more structure and introduced a set of new regulations to ensure better coordination (Burton et al., 2017). In fact, this experience shows that authority is always necessary, acting as an arbitration point that can reach a decision faster than consensus (Burton et al., 2017). This does not ensure that the decision taken is the good one but has nonetheless the advantages of speeding decision-making (Burton et al., 2017).

Flat organizations are particularly effective; however, challenges can arise, such as role ambiguity . Moreover, the inherent limitations of a boss-less structure is that the

latter is not scalable, meaning that it works well in small group but struggles as the organization grows (Burton et al., 2017).

However, Futurice, a Finnish game development company seems to have been able to develop while maintaining a flat hierarchy by following six distinctive steps (Vaara et al., 2021):

- 1- **Organic modular design** meaning that the company divided itself into several smaller autonomous modules (named “Tribes”).
- 2- **Coordination through supporting frameworks**, in the case of Futurice it was a 3*2 framework aiming at supporting strategic decision-making amidst the presence of multiple tribes. This concept supposes that if a team member wishes to take a decision, he has to make sure that it will benefit clients, colleagues and numbers (3), today and tomorrow (2).
- 3- **Financial Transparency**, all financial information whether in regard to incomes, earnings or projections are available to everyone. Comitology around finances is open to anyone willing to join. Everyone has access to other expenditures, including CEO’s.
- 4- **AI was used as a knowledge sharing tool**, as it was used to map the different skills and expertise of team members thus using resources in an optimized way.
- 5- **Agile learning** is supported by the idea of celebrating every success and celebrating every failure in new projects and committing to the principle of failing fast.
- 6- **Sharing a living story** consists in reminding team members that Futurice has gone a long way since its beginnings and also preserving ideas and values that are the pillars of the company.

Finally, companies that are being successful when it comes to their flat organizational structures are the ones who are willing to invest in learning opportunities, who are celebrating victories and even downfalls and are promoting their identity.

B. Remote and Hybrid Work Models

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to remote and hybrid work, urging companies to reimagine how and where work is performed. This trend has become a lasting fixture of organizational life and almost a social right, with businesses using digital collaborative tools to support distributed teams.

Example: Salesforce, a global leader in cloud-based software, adopted a “Work from Anywhere” policy that allows employees to choose between office-based, remote, or hybrid arrangements. As the President & CEO stated: “An immersive workspace is no longer limited to a desk in our Towers; the 9-to-5 workday is dead; and the employee experience is about more than ping-pong tables and snacks” (Hyder, 2021). Salesforce offered its employees three options for working: 1) Flex: Meaning employees will return to office 1 to 3 days a week to ensure teamwork, customer meetings and collaboration. 2) Fully remote: Employees whose presence is not required on site and who are geographically far from an office, can work from home. 3) Office-based: A smaller number of employees will work from office if the good accomplishment of their roles requires it (Hyder, 2021).

While remote working is subject of endless debates among bosses, a striking 91% of employees worldwide favor fully or partially remote working (Neat, 2024).

C. Agile and Networked Organizations

Another major trend is the adoption of agile methodologies and networked organizational forms. In fact, traditional rigid hierarchies with specific chain of command limit innovation in fast-paced environments (Dessain, n.d.). As a result, companies are adapting more flexible, structures where teams can take decisions and collaborate together (Dessain, n.d.).

In networked organizations, employees are brought together according to a common area of expertise. These employees collaborate with other specialists across the company to work in partnerships on certain projects (MasterClass, 2022). Thus, in networked organizations, the chain of command is not a rigid one, but it is made of clusters formed by different business units and local offices that work together on case-by-case basis (MasterClass, 2022). The full resources of a company are used to reach customer satisfaction avoiding strict limiting workflows (MasterClass, 2022). Networked organizations work faster, emphasizing responsiveness and iterative problem-solving. They are nonhierarchical, they have the possibility to reach out for help from out of the organization (outsourcing) if a specific skill is needed. They can break their divisions into silos as they focus on specialization. Project managers and team leaders report to central leadership. The executive team is lean, meaning that they focus on big picture decision-making and daily operational decisions are the individual's call (MasterClass, 2022). Originally developed for software development, agile principles are now being applied in diverse sectors including finance, marketing, and healthcare.

Example: Spotify is a marketplace providing users with access to music and digital content through a platform (Organimi, n.d.). In order to be able to compete with other significantly large content distributors (Amazon, Apple...), Spotify's structure should be flexible (Organimi, n.d.). The Spotify model, introduced by Henrik Kniberg and Anders Ivarsson in 2012 in the whitepaper [Scaling Agile @ Spotify](#), utilizes a unique structure based on organization around work and not in a rigid specific set of practices (Cruth, n.d.).

TEAM	DESCRIPTION
Squads	They are an autonomous group of 6 to 12 persons, similar to a scrum team and assisted by an agile coach and a product owner.
Tribes	Composed of different squads collaborating together. Tribes are composed of 40-150 persons. This number, respects the Dunbar number, suggesting that the average human brain can only maintain 150 relationships. A tribe lead ensures a fruitful collaboration.
Chapter	Led by a Senior Technology Lead, chapters ensure that specialists abide by best practices. This helps maintain engineering standards.
Guild	A guild is a community of people sharing the same interest. There are no formal leads but there is a guild coordinator who voluntarily proposes to help people get together.
Trio	A Tribe Lead, a product lead, and a design lead are what we call a trio. Each Tribe has a Trio to guarantee the continuous alignment between these three parties when working on a project.
Alliance	Alliances are an association of Tribe Trios (in general three or more) that work together closely to make sure that their Tribes collaborate equally on a goal that has positive impacts on all tribes equally.

Figure 2.2 Spotify's agile organization

Companies who adopt agile and networked organizations witness 15% drop of turnover rates, 25% decrease in operational costs (Lead.app, n.d.). The cons of this type of structure is difficult communication across multi-functional teams geographically dispersed (Lead.app, n.d.). On the other hand, accountability is not really clear as, when

everyone is in charge, no one is (Lead.app, n.d.). Lastly, dependence on technology might become a weakness (Lead.app, n.d.).

D. Employee Empowerment in Purpose-Driven Workplaces

Modern companies are gradually understanding the effect of purpose-driven work environments on employee empowerment and job satisfaction. This development is perfectly coherent with the increasing need for meaningful work, personal development, and psychological safety in the workplace. In the field of psychological safety, Google's project Aristotle is one of the most prominent ones.

Google's project 'Aristotle' developed by Amy Edmondson, aimed at exploring what were the patterns and actions that made teams perform better (Psych Safety, 2023). To reach this understanding, the project team used qualitative and quantitative data to assess the 180 teams (Psych Safety, 2023) working for Google. More than 200 interviews were conducted, and more than 250 team attributes were analyzed (Schneider, 2017). Project leader Julia Rozovsky identified 5 key attributes that improved team performance (Psych Safety, 2023):



Figure 2.3 Google's Project Aristotle

(Ref: <https://psychsafety.com/googles-project-aristotle/>)

Among factors that do not impact team performance, project leaders cite (Psych Safety, 2023):

- 1- Colocation of team members (sharing the same office does not impact performance).
- 2- Consensus driven decisions (everybody doesn't have to agree on a decision to get it done).
- 3- Extroversion of team members

- 4- Individual performance of team members (the presence of a high performing individual in a team can incumber performance).
- 5- Workload size
- 6- Seniority
- 7- Tenure

Other studies were inspired by the Aristotle program that further explored psychological safety. The first ingredient that was identified as fostering psychological safety in the workplace is to “reduce power gradients” meaning to reduce power gaps between team members (Psych Safety, 2023):



Figure 2.4 Psychological Safety at work

(Ref: <https://psychsafety.com/googles-project-aristotle/>)

There are other examples of companies who used the values they promote to enhance employee empowerment:

Example: Patagonia, a billion dollars brand based in California, specializing in outdoor apparels has been devoted to providing high quality products along with demonstrating environmental engagement (Purpose Economy, n.d.). Patagonia is an example for implementing projects that ensure sustainability, such as “1% for the planet. This endeavor consists of giving 1% of sales to environmental organizations and “Worn Wear Program” which sponsors the repair and reuse of the clothes (Purpose Economy, n.d).

Employees are encouraged to take initiative, innovate within their roles, and participate in corporate social responsibility efforts. This purpose-driven culture has contributed to high employee engagement and brand loyalty.

Empowered employees tend to be more motivated, creative, and resilient. Companies fostering such cultures often prioritize transparency, inclusivity, and participatory leadership styles. Nonetheless, achieving true empowerment involves more than decentralization, it requires trust, clarity, and systems that support autonomy without chaos.

E- Flex Office

Flex office reflects the absence of an assigned permanent desk within a company (Pouhin, 2023). This model has emerged after COVID-19 in response to remote work and need for space optimization. It answers the needs of employees in terms of autonomy and flexibility. Fluidity in seating enhances innovation and breaks down silos. It pushes employees to interact with each other and to adapt their workstation according to their needs. It fosters interdepartmental collaborations and knowledge sharing. Plus, allowing employees to decide where to work from enhances their sense of autonomy and is rather

empowering. Despite the cons related to flex office such as potential distraction and dilution of team cohesion, it is still a sign of agility and modernity and can be positive for employer brand. In fact, flex office can enhance talent retention and attractiveness.

F- Holacracy

Holacracy is defined by an organization that is self-governing and that gives employees the necessary power to lead their roles without having a manager's approval (Rumage, 2023). It aims at increasing agility, transparency, and accountability inside organizations (Mooncamp, n.d.).

To implement this structure, presidents of companies implement what is called a "Holacracy Constitution" (Rumage, 2023). In this context, every employee has a total understanding of the other person's role as the expectations of each position are transparent and detailed (Rumage, 2023).

Key features of holacracy:

In holacracy, organization is elaborated in regard to the work to be accomplished (Rumage, 2023).

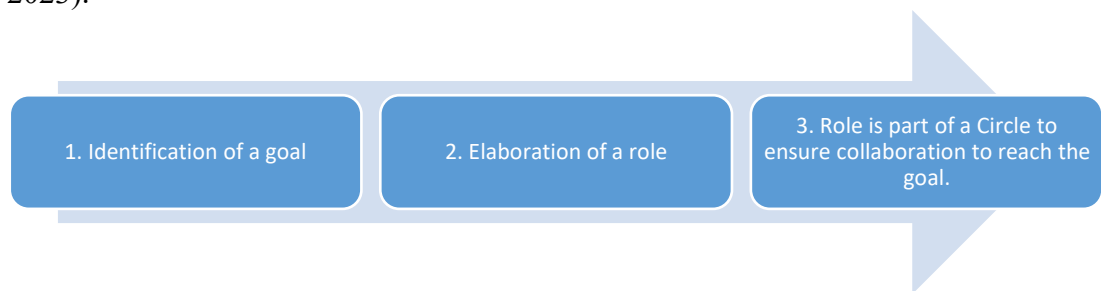


Figure 2.5 Holacracy

When a goal is identified, a particular role is elaborated with clear responsibilities and actions. These responsibilities evolve throughout the advancement of the project. Employees have the right to decide whatever actions are necessary, in the role(s) that

interest(s) them, to ensure the fruitful accomplishment of the goal taking into consideration company's rules or other people's roles (Rumage, 2023).

Then, each role is related to a 'circle' with a common purpose. The circle regularly holds tactical meetings and governance meetings to ensure coordination, and the advancements are shared with all the organization (Rumage, 2023). Digital platforms such as "Holaspirt" and "Glassfrog" support the sharing of information (Rumage, 2023).

There are several essential roles in circles (Mooncamp, n.d.):

- 1- Lead Links who connect the circle with the super circle (or parent circle).
- 2- Rep Links, these are the facilitators who fix issues between circles and represent the circle in its super-circle's meetings.
- 3- Facilitator, who ensures that meetings are fruitful and in coherence with the holacracy's organization.
- 4- Secretary, who takes minutes of meetings and supervises decisions and role modifications.

One of the major downsides of holacracy remains certainly in its complexity and the considerable amount of training necessary to fully understand it and implement it (Mooncamp, n.d.).

Among companies that successfully implemented Holacracy organizational systems, are Zappos, Medium and Danish IT Company Rebuild21 (Mooncamp, n.d.).

The rationale for identifying key organizational trends is to highlight how companies are moving away from traditional hierarchical structures in favor of models that empower employees, foster innovation, and give them a greater voice in decision-making.

The contemporary organizational landscape is marked by a shift from rigidity to adaptability, from hierarchy to collaboration, and from control to empowerment. Flat

structures, remote work, agile methodologies, and employee-centric cultures reflect a broader movement toward organizational designs that value speed, innovation, and human potential. While these trends offer substantial benefits, they also pose new challenges in terms of coordination, leadership, and cultural cohesion. For doctoral-level research in business administration, these developments offer fertile ground for exploring how structure impacts performance, innovation, and employee well-being in the 21st-century organization.

2.12 The Double-Edged Sword of Employee Empowerment

In an era where organizational success increasingly depends on agility, innovation, and employee engagement, empowering employees has become a widely embraced strategy. Governments, NGOs, and organizations are investing in initiatives aiming to enhance the skills of their employees, promoting open communication cultures and encouraging leadership and feedback at all levels. Employees are now more knowledgeable, skilled, and vocal than ever before, a shift that brings undeniable benefits and also introduces complex challenges.

When not managed well, empowerment can lead to conflict and reputational risks for the company. The line between autonomy and authority is very thin and can provoke tensions inside a company if not carefully drawn. As employees gain knowledge and critical thinking capabilities, they are more likely to question decisions, processes, and even the competence of leadership. It would be fair to assume that this is the reason why change management is a skill gaining importance in today's complex organizations (Bradley, 2024). Leaders who are not always prepared to manage empowered employees and their skepticism in regards of change and transformation, need assistance in guiding employees through evolution. Resistance can seem like a behavior that is breaking the

traditional chain of command, particularly in hierarchical organizations where authority was historically unchallenged.

In the previous cases explored in this study, employees were encouraged to speak up and share ideas, as this has been linked with increasing engagement. But when everyone has a voice and there are no clear norms for how those voices should be used or in what weight (are all voices equal?), the organization risks decision paralysis. As not every idea can be implemented, and not all criticism is constructive, employees risk frustration. Therefore, organizations should balance openness along with structure.

Moreover, the need for constant participation and ongoing feedback, can create pressure on employees to speak up. In some cases, this can lead to feedback as a void action, one that is done just to be seen as in adherence with the process, without meaningfully contributing. On the opposite side, others may still feel frustration if their input is consistently asked for but, overlooked.

Another major challenge lies in the unequal distribution of knowledge, skills, and voice which can end in unequal distribution of power. For instance, workers in low-wage roles may have less access to opportunities, leadership trainings, or digital tools. This creates a new kind of inequality, where empowerment becomes a privilege rather than a right. Plus, without necessary knowledge and without being ready, employees cannot reach effective decision making (Fripp, 2025).

As more employees develop leadership skills and take initiative to educate themselves, traditional leaders may feel their authority threatened. Leaders are afraid their team will replace them (Tony Robbins UK, n.d.). This can result in the marginalization of innovative employees with an out-of-the-box mindset.

Managers can doubt and be skeptical about employees' ability to be empowered and hinder initiatives linked to employee empowerment (StrategicLeadersConsulting,

2024). To overcome this challenge, managers need trainings, build trust with their employees and understand that empowerment can have positive impacts on the organization (StrategicLeadersConsulting, 2024).

In conclusion, empowered employees through knowledge, skills, and voice is a powerful drive for innovation, engagement, and resilience. Yet it comes with significant challenges that prove that effective leadership is required to navigate through all these difficulties. Above all, leaders must accept empowerment as a long-term transformation, one that demands openness and a willingness to redefine what leadership truly means in the digital era. Jack Welch speaks of a generosity gene that should be in leaders as they should not be afraid but rather enjoy others' success (Jack Welch Management Institute, 2015).

2.13 Summary

Despite the extensive amount of research in regards of the definition and characteristics of leadership, there remains a gap in examining the complex tripartite relation between leadership, digital transformation and employee empowerment, especially post COVID-19. Empowerment of employees is still considered as a leadership best practice and effective organizational structure not as a phenomenon coming from employees themselves. Consequently, this shift also calls for a re-evaluation of power dynamics within organizations induced by changing paradigms.

Throughout the literature review we can conclude that valuable material has emerged on the definition, characteristics and behaviors of effective leaders. Also, there is a clear vision of the importance of digital tools, employee engagement, AI and digital transformation. Nevertheless, there remains a gap in understanding how evolving leadership should adapt to the changing workforce power dynamics, especially in the context of the digital age. In fact, while employee empowerment traditionally came from

effective leadership and good management, the unlimited availability of information, knowledge and digital tools has shifted the source.

Are we witnessing a reverse of the situation? As Kellerman (2016) points out, the term "follower" is typically seen as the antithesis of the leader, suggesting a less powerful role. However, today's workforce is actively engaged in shaping the direction of the organization, asserting their own power and challenging obsolete leadership models. Improved knowledge can, for instance, result in tangible gains in product development and in efficiency (Davenport and Prusak, 1998). This shift calls for a rethinking of the traditional leader-follower dynamic.

In this context, the concept of power balance, emerges to emphasize the increasingly equal distribution of power between leaders and employees.

A key question remains is whether leaders will embrace these changes or try to maintain control through banning remote work, insisting on keeping rigid hierarchies and retaining information from lower-level employees.

In today's world, where individuals are intelligent, self-reliant, and fully capable, the terms 'leaders', 'managers', 'followers', must be reevaluated. It is both bold and necessary to redefine these roles and ensure that everyone is recognized as equally valuable.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview of the Research Problem

This study wishes to examine the consequences of democratization of information and knowledge through digital platforms, and the proliferation of digital skills among employees on traditional leader/follower power dynamics. The current evolving landscape, marked by digital disruptions, marks a step towards a balance of power, a model in which power is evenly distributed between leaders and employees.

A convergent parallel mixed-methods design combining explanatory and exploratory approach using secondary and primary data will provide a clear view and valuable information into the reality of current power dynamics in companies. It will help predict future drifts by identifying current macro trends. The results of this research are intended to contribute efficiently to previous research and to guide companies in the definition of their employer brand and organizational strategy.

3.2 Operationalization of Theoretical Constructs

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study is to efficiently explore whether knowledge, information, digital tools and visibility earned by employees are slowly drifting power away from leaders. It aims to determine if authority is now shared as all the above features are available for individuals who wants them. In order to reach this understanding, four key theoretical constructs will be examined. Theoretical constructs are the pillars of any theory (Skinner et al., n.d.). The first one is “empowerment through use of digital tools”. This theoretical concept will allow a profound understanding on the effect of digital tools on employee autonomy. The second key concept is “empowerment through knowledge”, it will help understand how knowledge and skills effect sense of power, legitimacy and confidence within employees.

The third concept is “empowerment through information”, this will be useful to further evaluate the impact of access to information on power. The Fourth concept is “empowerment through access to social media”, this will help assess the impact of visibility on empowerment.

To effectively measure the interrelation with above key concepts, this research was based on the collection of secondary data through thorough research and on the collection of primary data through a survey. As the original research is in English language, the survey was shared with employees in the UK, via a company specialized in research driven polls. The survey consisted in a total of 14 concise and neutral questions and 1 open-ended question. The outcome would allow to assess employees level of empowerment in the digital era. The format of the answers was assessed on a likert scale basis, with of 1 to 5 level of agreement (Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree).

To have an in-depth comprehension of the participants’ vision of empowerment, one open-ended qualitative question was added.

The combination of both quantitative and qualitative data is a valid and legitimate basis to prove (or refute) the theory of power balance.

3.3 Research Purpose and Questions

The main goal of the mixed method research is to examine whether new opportunities to expand information, knowledge and autonomous work, paved the way for employees to gain power. Even though this is a conceptual research, a survey was carried out in the UK to give further validity and depth to the study. The UK was chosen for linguistic and logistic reasons. Also, UK is a developed country with strong digital culture and focus on employee engagement.

Research Question 1

How does the digital era promote employee empowerment in current organizational settings?

The following sub-research questions were asked to further clarify the scope of the study:

Sub-Research Question 1

What are the main digital tools that promote employee empowerment?

Sub-Research Question 2

How is empowerment reflected in the reality of everyday corporate life?

3.4 Research Design

The research is developed upon a convergent parallel mixed-methods design combining explanatory and exploratory approaches. In order to confirm “balance of power” hypothesis, quantitative data from Likert-scale survey questions were analyzed and qualitative data from a single open-ended response were analyzed thematically to explore emerging insights. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, the research aims to both explore the reconfiguration of power between leaders and employees in this current digital era and generate new understandings about this subject. According to Harvard Catalyst (2021), mixed method research is a strategic way to combine qualitative and quantitative research methods and get the best of each. Moreover, merging both insights allows a deeper exploration of a research question (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023).

The first phase consisted of an analysis of the existing literature (including journals, reports, and other credible material related to digital transformation, employee empowerment and leadership). Both qualitative insights (thematics, theories) and quantitative data (surveys, statistics, findings) were collected and helped develop the survey instrument. The second phase involved conveying a survey consisting of 14

Likert-scale questions and one open-ended question, aimed at quantitatively and qualitatively validating (or not) the vision gained from the initial phase. This strategy enables the research to present holistic and structured insights while supporting them with grounded findings.

In collaboration with a French institute, specialized in surveys related to research and compliant with GDPR regulations, a structured online questionnaire was sent to a panel of participants in the UK. Participants came from working environments with high level of use of digital technologies and some came from environments that are not much impacted by digital technologies.

Due to constraints related to GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), conducting and recording qualitative interviews presented complexities, particularly in ensuring anonymity, consent, and data protection. For this reason, the use of in-person interviews has been excluded from the research strategy and fully anonymous, self-reported surveys were favored. This totally excludes risks related to personal data collection, aligns perfectly with ethical research practices and provides useful information in a shorter time.

Secondary data is drawn from reputable academic databases (e.g. Google Scholar, Research.Net, Gallup...). Also, references include government and institutional reports, and publications from prominent consulting firms and organizations operating in the digital sector. This will provide context and support the interpretation of survey findings by illustrating trends in leadership models, digital transformation, and employee autonomy.

Quantitative data collected through an online survey will be analyzed using Microsoft Excel. This approach is an accessible and practical one for handling statistics and numbers. Excel features will be used to present visual representations of participants

replies. This approach is considered to be the most suitable one for the scope of the study and allows for a clear interpretation of patterns and trends within the collected data.

Qualitative data collected from participants' insights will be analyzed using Nvivo and Microsoft Excel. This approach facilitates data analysis and allows for deep emerging topics.

3.5 Population and Sample

This study focuses on understanding the evolving balance of power between leaders and employees in the context of digital transformation. It targets two types of populations. It targets those who are either responsible of or are witnessing employee empowerment (leaders/senior managers) or those who are actively using digital tools and can assure of their impact of empowerment (employees). This population is particularly relevant to the research aim, which is to reflect the workforce population that is most directly affected by technological changes, knowledge democratization, and the diffusion of decision-making authority.

To ensure a relevant and purposeful dataset, the research employed a convenient sampling strategy. This approach is commonly used in business and management research where it is important that participants possess specific knowledge, experience, or characteristics required to address the research questions. In this case, individuals selected had to meet one key criteria: Be currently employed in the private sector in the UK. Participation was voluntary and incentivized.

The final sample consisted of 205 participants, of whom 100 were employees and 105 were leaders or senior managers. As a matter of fact, this distribution aims to reflect power balance through representation equilibrium, although in pyramidal organization of the workplace, regular employees significantly outnumber those in leadership positions. It also enables the study to compare perspectives across hierarchical levels, which is

essential for evaluating the perception of bottom-up power shifts and the role of digital tools in this transformation.

Participants were sourced in collaboration with a French research institute specializing in GDPR-compliant academic survey distribution. The institute maintains access to a pre-established panel of professionals across different industries in the UK and several other countries. In order to avoid language barriers, the UK was chosen among other European countries. This partnership ensured adherence to data protection regulations and allowed for a structured and ethically sound participant recruitment process. The use of a third-party survey provider also improved response rates, reactivity and data reliability, particularly in the case of the sensitive nature of these topics (as workplace empowerment, leadership, and organizational culture).

The decision to include only UK-based participants in the sample was made to control any difficulty that might arise in languages or organizational culture. In fact, cross-country comparisons might be complicated, particularly in relation to employment structures and digital governance.

There is a theoretical and methodological reason why the sample size is 205. From a theoretical point of view, 205 participants seem sufficient to identify patterns and trends in empowerment, impact of digital usage, and evaluation of autonomy across different roles and industries. Also, it is still possible to identify recurrent feedback or opinions in the qualitative answers. From a statistical perspective, the minimum sample size required was calculated with G*Power and enhanced to gain further insights. The relatively shy representation of the younger generation is certainly a limitation (2% age 18-24), yet it still provides valuable information into how employers and employees view the evolution of power dynamics in digital environments.

By collecting opinions from both hierarchical and regular employees, the study creates a reliable base to examine whether a more symmetrical relationship is emerging, a modern landscape in which employees feel more informed, autonomous, and involved in decision-making processes thanks to the digital era.

3.6 Participant Selection

Participants for this study were recruited from a pre-established panel managed by the partner survey company. These panelists are individuals with verified profiles, ensuring credibility and relevance to the research topic. The partner survey company is the party managing relationship with the participants who are compensated for their participation, in accordance with the agreed upon procedures. This arrangement guarantees a reliable and fast response rate and supports ethical engagement.

The partner is compliant with ethical research practices and adheres to GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their responses were collected anonymously to ensure privacy and data protection. No personal information was gathered to avoid collecting unnecessary personal data. Panelists received a Group Policy prior to answering the questionnaire (APPENDIX D).

3.7 Instrumentation

The research instruments applied in this research are 3 demographic questions, a set of 14 Likert-Scale questions, developed by the researcher as foundation of quantitative survey and one open-ended question. Quantitative data was collected to calculate statistics and test hypothesis, and the qualitative question was used to collect insights. During the development of the instrument, neither ambiguous nor biased language were used in coherence with instrumentalization best practices (IntelliSurvey Staff, 2024). A five-point Likert-Scale is used because according to Sol (2024), among

other benefits, this maintains participants' comfort and stimulates engagement. It is also more flexible than binary "yes" or "no" questions (Sol, 2024). The questionnaire was easy to fill both on PC and on the phone. This method combined with collection of secondary data offered a suitable strategy to explore the concept.

As for the questionnaire, it was developed in strict coherence with the four variables identified in the key conceptual framework and validated by the literature review. This ensures theoretical coherence and methodological rigor. Questions were written in a way to be engaging and taking no more than 10-12 minutes to complete (Shah, 2022).

Part of the survey process elaborated in collaboration with the survey partner, included 4 steps. The first step was the transmission of the questionnaire by the researcher to the company's team, for it to be included in the platform. This step was performed by the company in order to reduce risks of error or misuse of the platform, leading to unnecessary waste of time. The second phase consisted of a test sent to the researcher that allowed minor corrections and global perception of the participants' experience. Process seemed fluid, easy and relatively quick. After minor corrections, the third step aimed at running a soft launch that involved a small number of individuals who fit the eligibility criteria. This is one of the best practices in professional research to identify last-minute problems before sending it to a larger pool (IntelliSurvey Staff, 2023). As mentioned, the main goal of the pilot study was to test the questionnaire and ensure that the questions were in conformity with general ethics and GDPR under the supervision of the company's DPO. Also, this is a way to detect any flaws or technical errors such as missing options or broken skip logic. This step helped to estimate the survey duration, which was chosen to be no more than 10 minutes, an important aspect for response rates and participant experience. The pilot study was conducted by the

partner in the same way as the study. A group of nearly 20 panelists were recruited and answered the questions. These participants received a notification with an invitation to voluntarily participate to the questionnaire. After the researcher ensured questions were clear and demographic requests where relevant for the study, the survey was opened to receive participants. Survey was closed when response rate was 205 participants composed of 105 leaders and 100 employees, although there is a slight difference in response rates, the gap was not substantial enough to affect the results.

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

In order to study the “Balance of Power” concept between leaders and followers in the digital age, this study adopted a quantitative and qualitative research based on grounded theory approach, using a structured, researcher-developed survey instrument. Grounded theory refers to explaining the reasons behind a certain phenomenon and developing a hypothesis to understand it (Tenny, Brannan and Brannan, 2022). Data collection was conducted in collaboration with a French survey company recruited online and specifically chosen for its specialization in doctoral level academic research. Their expertise ensured methodological rigor, ethical compliance, and effective outreach to participants with validated profiles.

Before launching the main study to a larger pool, the survey company conducted a pilot test with a small panel of participants representative of the target population. This pre-test aimed to evaluate the clarity of questions, the logic of the response structure, and the average completion time. Based on the feedback, minor adjustments were made to improve the phrasing of selected items and optimize user experience. This step helped ensure the instrument’s validity and reliability.

The finalized online survey was then distributed via the survey company’s secure platform to employees working in various sectors in the UK. Participants were selected to

represent the voice of both leaders (managers, supervisors) and followers (non-supervisory employees), enabling a perception of balance of power from both parties. The survey would be available for a two-week period, during which reminder messages were sent to encourage participation and maximize the response rate.

The questionnaire consisted of six sections: (1) demographic information (age, role, rank, size of the company), (2) use of digital tools, (3) power through access to knowledge (4) power through access to information (5) power through visibility on social media (6) perception of power in modern workplace. The majority of the questions used Likert-scale items, designed to produce quantitative data suitable for statistical analysis. In addition, one open-ended focused question was included to collect qualitative insights and capture richer personal experiences. The question was designed in a neutral way encouraging the exploration of the topic (Rosala, 2024).

All participants received a clear explanation of the study's purpose and provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. The anonymity of responses and the confidentiality of data were of great concern.

3.9 Data Analysis

The first step in analyzing the data consisted in cleaning the data by removing participants who did not finish the entire survey and useless inputs (tests). Then, a consistency check was conducted, in order to ensure that responses to Likert-Scale statements were reliable. To assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire items, Cronbach's alpha was calculated using google collab (APPENDIX E). The resulting value was 0,91, which indicates an excellent reliability of the results.

Cronbach Alpha value	Interpretation
0.91-1.00	Excellent
0.81-0.90	Good
0.71-0.80	Good and Acceptable
0.61-0.70	Acceptable
0.01-0.06	Non acceptable

Table 3.1 Interpretation of Cronbach's Alpha

The-Interpretation-Value-of-Cronbach-Alpha-Konting-et-al-2009.png (850×236)

Then, data analysis was conducted at three distinct levels: (a) quantitative analysis of survey responses, (b) thematic analysis of open-ended qualitative responses, and (c) integration of both data sets to draw holistic conclusions regarding the influence of digital transformation on employee-leader power dynamics. The study involved responses from 205 UK-based professionals across multiple industries who completed a structured online questionnaire.

#	Significant use of Digital tools at work	Limited use of Digital tools	TOTAL
Leader	73	32	105
Employee	25	75	100
TOTAL	98	107	205

Table 3.2 Demography of Participants

The quantitative analysis focused on responses to Likert-scale items designed to measure participants' sense of empowerment thanks to information, decision-making influence and perceptions in digitally impacted environments. Descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviations, were calculated to determine trends in digital tools, perceived autonomy, and power balance. For example (98/205),

48% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that increased access to information empower employees in their roles.

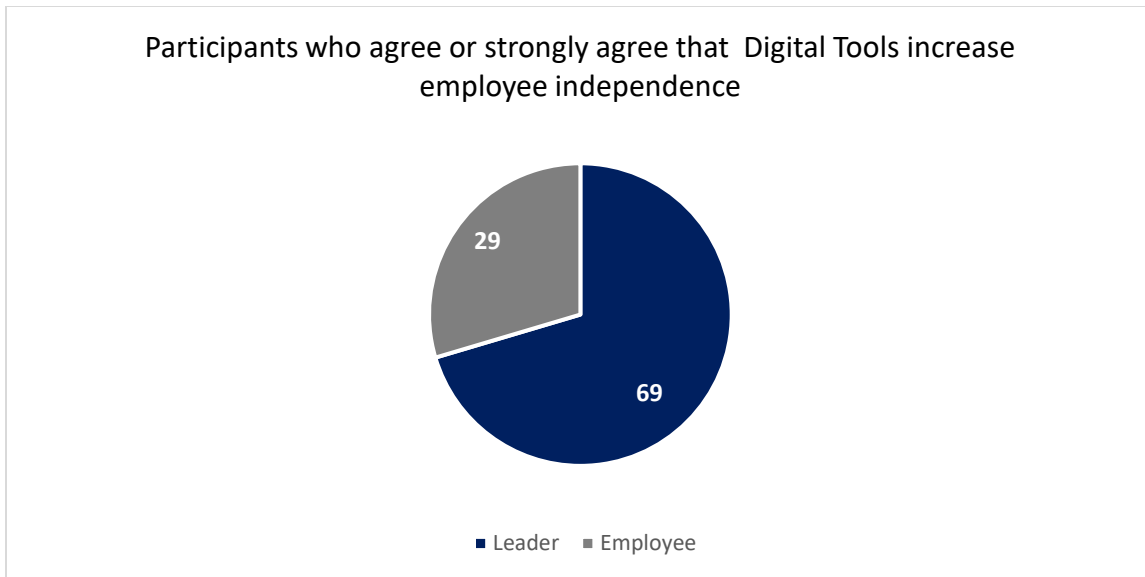


Table 3.3 Participants who agree or strongly agree that Digital Tools increase employee independence

The qualitative analysis involved the evaluation of open-ended survey responses using thematic analysis. Narrative responses were reviewed manually to extract insights. Key phrases and key reflections were imported to NVivo 15 as well as in an Excel sheet. Then, responses were refined, and similar insights were joined. This process enabled a deeper understanding of how employees and leaders perceive their influence and power in a post-digital transformation context.

In the integration phase, findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated to form a comprehensive analysis. For example, qualitative feedback indicating an increased ability in decision-making among employees was supported by quantitative insights describing greater confidence in challenging traditional leadership authority. Conversely, several participants noted no connection between technological

empowerment and shift in decision-making power or did not feel concerned by this shift (25%). This integration offered a nuanced perspective on the evolving power dynamics in digitally enabled workplaces and underscored the complexity of leadership transformation in the digital era.

3.10 Research Design Limitations

Although this study offers valuable new insights into how digital transformation and in particular how enhanced access to information and knowledge has influenced the power dynamics between employees and leaders, several limitations should be taken into consideration. These limitations open the door for future studies to be conducted.

First, the study acknowledges the fact that researcher's own opinions can shape analysis and introduce bias to the conclusions.

Second, sample size and geographic scope are limited to a sample of 205 professionals based in the United Kingdom. While this provides focused insight into the UK context, findings may not be similar to other countries or other global settings where cultural, technological, and organizational structures differ.

Third, the questionnaire was based on self-reported data. Self-reported data is when a respondent is filling out the questions alone without assistance (Teamscopeapp, n.d). The research relied on self-reported responses collected through a structured questionnaire. This method is subject to respondent bias, including social desirability bias, where the applicant wishes to appear socially acceptable even if the questionnaire is anonymous (Rosenman, Tennekoon and Hill, 2011) or misunderstanding of the question (Rosenmann, Tennekoon and Hill, 2011). All these factors might lead to selective reporting which may affect the accuracy of the data.

Fourth, this research is conducted on cross-sectional design basis. Meaning that the data was collected from a population a single point of time and does not include

timely follow up (Wang & Cheng, 2020). This limits the ability to establish underlying relationships between digital transformation and changes in power dynamics. A longitudinal design, where individuals are followed up over time (Bmj, n.d), could have offered deeper insights into how these dynamics evolve hand in hand with digital transformation.

Sector representation is a fifth limitation to the study. As participants were recruited from various industries, the study was not intended to have a sector-specific orientation.

The sixth limitation is qualitative depth. The qualitative data was drawn from open-ended survey responses rather than in-depth interviews or focus groups. While thematic analysis was used to extract meaningful themes, richer insights might have come out of one-on-one interview with leaders, specialists or different professionals. In a context where GDPR is a general concern, collecting personal data and reporting in a written format appears to contain several complexities.

The seventh limitation is related to technology. As the study focused broadly on digital transformation, it did not tackle specific elements (e.g., AI, HR Systems, collaborative platforms...). Future studies could benefit from a more refined approach to assess which tools have the most significant impact on power redistribution.

Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide a solid foundation for understanding how information access through digital means is reshaping organizational power structures. It also paves the way to future research and contributes studies related to leadership, employee empowerment and organizational structure.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter provided a thorough explanation of the research design that provided a framework for this study. Information included, survey process, participant selection,

data collection, data analysis and limitation. Furthermore, it highlighted ethical matters such as GDPR that were taken into consideration. The following chapter provides an explanation of the findings.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

This study wishes to address the seeming literature gap in power shift study especially after covid-19. The purpose of this convergent parallel mixed-methods design combining explanatory and exploratory approach using secondary and primary data was to understand, how and if, the democratization of information, knowledge, access to digital tools and social media lead to power balance. To reach this target, the research sought to answer the following key questions:

4.1 Research Question

Research Question 1

How does the digital era promote employee empowerment in current organizational settings?

The following sub-research questions were asked to further clarify the scope of the study:

Sub-Research Question 1

What are the main digital advancements that promote employee empowerment?
(quantitative)

Sub-Research Question 2

How is empowerment reflected in the reality of everyday corporate life?
(quantitative and qualitative)

Demographic Characteristics

A total of 209 participants answered the Likert-scale questionnaires. However, three participants did not complete it and there was one test from the company's team, these were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the final population size for Likert-scale questionnaire included insights from 205 participants. Of this sample, 4 participants

(2%) were aged 18-24, 40 participants (20%) were aged 25-34, 60 participants (29%) were aged 35 to 44, 56 participants (27%) were aged 45 to 54, 39 participants (19%) were aged 55 to 64, 6 participants (3%) were aged 65+. No questions about gender were asked as this did not seem relevant for this study.

As for company size, 17 participants (8%) were part of a company composed of 1-10 employees, 22 participants (11%) worked in companies composed of 11-50 employees, 35 participants (17%) worked in companies composed of 51-200 employees, 40 participants (19%) worked for companies composed of 201-500 employees, 17 participants worked for (8%) worked for companies composed of 501-1000 employees, 74 participants (36%) work for companies composed of 1001+ employees.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The researcher used quantitative techniques to analyze the quantitative data gathered from the closed-end survey responses. Descriptive statistics were studied using frequencies and percentages as well as mean and standard deviations. Before conducting multiple regression and to ensure robustness of the analysis, linearity between the dependent variable (Question 14) and each independent variable was assessed using Jamovi. Only three representative scatterplots are presented in Appendix F, illustrating the typical linear relationships observed among all variables (Appendix F). This detailed and comprehensive approach ensured that every survey question was examined for linearity. Then a multiple regression test was conducted using Jamovi, an easy-to-use statistical spreadsheet that represented an interesting alternative to expensive statistical tools such as SPSS and SAS (The Jamovi project, 2025).

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis will provide interesting insights about topics that are difficult to quantify (Tenny, Brannan and Brannan, 2022). The method used to analyze

the qualitative data was deductive thematic analysis, guided by a predefined hypothesis. The research was conducted according to the six-step deductive thematic analysis process as explained by Naeem et al. (2023). It involves a systematic process of identifying patterns within qualitative data in order to develop a conceptual model and it is depicted as follows: Step 1 – Transcription and Familiarization with the Data, Step 2 – Identification of Keywords, Step 3 – Coding, Step 4 – Theme Development, Step 5 – Conceptualization based on keywords, codes and themes, Step 6 – Development of conceptual model. These steps are explained below in detail.

Phase 1: Transcription and Familiarization with the Data

This preliminary phase in qualitative data analysis suggests that researchers proceed to an in-depth immersion in the data to be analyzed (Sopact University, 2024). For this end, data was transferred to an Excel Sheet, rearranged and was read multiple times, thoroughly, in order to gain a full understanding of the information.

Phase 2: Identification of Keywords

According to Naeem et al. (2023), the identification of powerful and relevant keywords paves the way to coding and data analysis. For this study, most common keywords were highlighted and systematically organized.

Phase 3: Coding

As previously mentioned, this research proposed a deductive thematic analysis to explore the qualitative responses gathered through a single open-ended survey question. Since this research is guided by a specific hypothesis, the objective was to look for patterns in what participants said that either supported or challenged that assumption. In order to achieve this target, a set of initial codes was created based on research keywords and key ideas, inspired by the literature review and the theoretical framework supporting the study. These codes were then applied using NVivo 15, which helped to organize and

manipulate data. While the approach was mainly guided by the study hypothesis, the researcher stayed open to unexpected themes that would emerge organically from the participants' responses. Every feedback was read carefully and dragged to the appropriate thematic. If the thematic was not pre-indicated, then it was added to the others.

Q5. In what ways, if any, do you think digital tools (ex: AI, collaborative tools, access to education, access to information, social media platforms) have influenced decision-making power between leaders and employees in the modern workplace?	
<i>Initial Code</i>	<i>Frequency in open-ended survey</i>
Improved access to information (inside and outside) a company	32
Improved access to education	21
Digital tools (AI) are unreliable	3
Encourage autonomy	3
Balance power between leaders and employees	15
Ensure better quality of data	4
Decision making shifted from humans to AI	6
Digital technology has not altered power between leaders and employees	22
Digital technologies do not replace human relations	1
Employees can challenge leaders	1
Employees can create their own career opportunities	1
Flattened Hierarchy	1
Employees have no decision power	2
Foster empathy	1

Foster openness to outside influence	2
Help grow business	3
Help employees and leaders identify trends	1
Improve employees' assertiveness	4
Improve collaboration	17
Improve communication	9
Improve decision making	18
Help employees innovate	8
Improve management	3
Improve productivity	25
Increased supervision	2
Leaders are more accessible	7
Negative emotions towards digital technologies	10
Process is less reliable	1
Employees can shape opinions independently	1
Employees can speak up on social media	2
Employees have access to their leaders and other networking opportunities on social media	2
Social media gave employees access to information to improve business	2
Transparency in decision-making	8
Unsure what to think	21

Table 4.1 SQR2 Initial Codes

Phase 4: Theme Development

A theme is an implicit subject that is identified through frequently repeated ideas (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Following coding process, similar ideas were regrouped into broader themes. The goal was to identify recurring views that connect different participants' responses in a meaningful way. The researcher revisited initial 259 codes multiple times to ensure coherence and depth. Nvivo 15 facilitated this process showing a visual representation of code clusters. Although the analysis was driven in a deductive manner, the researcher remained open to new insights and ensured their representation. This is to enrich the data beyond initial expectations. This laid the foundation for the conceptual development that followed.

Theme	Description	Sample Code	Frequency
Empowerment through autonomy	Digital tools are perceived as granting some autonomy to employees.	Encourage autonomy, assertiveness, social media	16
Balance and redistribution of power	Digital tools are reshaping the distribution of power.	Balance of power, transparency, flattened hierarchy	31
Empowerment through access to information and resources	Greater access to information and education through digital tools make employees more informed and	Access to information, access to education, identification of trends	56

	independent decision-makers.		
Communication and Collaboration	Technology improves the quality of interaction and teamwork, which influences how decisions are made collectively.	Communication, collaboration, empathy	27
Improved productivity and management	Digital tools improve productivity and enlighten decision making	Productivity, growth, management	31
Resistance & Uncertainty	Some respondents expressed skepticism, uncertainty, or concerns about the real impact of digital tools on leadership-employee dynamics	Negative emotions, no change, unsure	56

Table 4.2 Codes divided by themes

Phase 5: Conceptualization based on keywords, codes and themes

Once the main themes began to emerge through coding process, the next step consisted in understanding how these themes merge with the rest of the study. The phase of conceptualization, aimed at connecting keywords, codes and themes to explore deeper

the factors contributing to Balance of Power between leaders and employees in current digital workplace. The analysis began with the identification of frequent keywords such as decision-making, communication, collaboration, information, empowerment, knowledge, education and social media. These words tend towards a workplace where there is a sense of unity, collectiveness and also initiative. Going from this point of view, themes as “empowerment through autonomy”, “Balance and redistribution of power”, “empowerment through access to information and resources”, “communication and collaboration”, “Improved productivity and management” paint a landscape where employees are less reliant on supervision and are more engaged. Participants emphasized not only on access to knowledge but also access to information allowing them to make more informed decisions. They highlighted how collaborative tools allowed for better collaboration between team members and how it broke barriers between leaders and employees. AI-enabled systems facilitated quicker, more transparent decision-making and enhanced productivity, it even allows teams to make forecasts and plan ahead.

Furthermore, the reference to social media in 6 responses reveals a new kind of visibility and influence acquired by employees. Such digital platforms, gave them a voice, presented networking opportunities, even gave them direct access to their leaders.

However, the positive side of empowerment was not the only one to emerge from participants’ answers. The theme “resistance and uncertainty” captured a more skeptical perspective of employee empowerment in the digital age. Some even clearly stated that nothing changed and that leaders are still the ones holding all the power. Others even mentioned a downside to digital tools like the increase of supervision. This subtlety led to a clearer understanding of the conceptual landscape.

These findings ultimately joined the concept of “balance of power”, a more equal distribution of decision-making influence between leaders and followers. It is necessary

to remember that this concept did not emerge from any keyword, code of direct reply from participants but rather from the way they interact together, collectively. Access to knowledge, digital tools, information, and social platforms are not only privileges coming from a digital era, but they are also striking factors paving the way to a new kind of leadership dynamic.

Phase 6: Development of conceptual model

The endpoint of the qualitative research is the development of conceptual model, aiming at bringing all available data together to support the conceptual framework developed in chapter 2.1 of this study. As previously explained, the concept to be developed revolves around power balance. A concept supported by four key ideas: access to knowledge, access to information, access to digital tools, and access to social media. These were proposed as factors enabling a shift of power dynamics in modern organizations. Participants often mentioned the importance of accessibility of information on transparency. They also spoke about education, learning and using digital tools to collaborate, communicate and innovate. Many expressed how, with the availability of all these resources, they were more apt to take enlightened decisions faster. This theme strongly supports empowerment and autonomy. At the heart of the model is the concept of employee empowerment. The data suggested that empowerment is not just a matter of motivation or HR policy. Rather, it is a natural phenomenon that occurs when people have access to the right tools, the right knowledge, the right information and are encouraged to act autonomously. “Less decisions need to go through management due to AI “, “Digital tools have influenced decision making in the following ways , employees are now able to access company data, policies etc more easily as well as information spreading now made easier also there's now greater autonomy as employees can now make informed decisions and also take ownership of their work “, “They have shifted it

toward a more collaborative and transparent environment, e.g. through tools like Teams. The rise of remote work through digital tools has given employees more autonomy too”, “The more knowledge you have the more confidence you have”. Comments like these prove that when given the right tools, many employees no longer rely on hierarchical permission to contribute to a company’s success. They act, decide, and even lead, simply because they feel equipped to do so.

These changes contribute to understanding the model developed in this study, Balance of Power. It is depicted as a more equivalent distribution of influence between leaders and employees. Rather than leadership being concentrated at the top, like in pyramidal organizations, it becomes shared, based on expertise, initiative, and collaboration. Participants indicated that leadership felt more accessible “It brings them (employees and leaders) closer together”, “Digital tools have increased and improved the communication gap between leaders and employees through the use of different channels internally and externally”. They can share different views and lean on each other’s experiences, where team members contributed equally to decision-making and innovation, and where technology supported open, two-way communication.

Also, participants in their answers provided valuable insights into the effects of these changes. In fact, the impact of empowerment through digital technology are truly felt by employees in their capacity to innovate, to satisfy customers and in the increase in productivity: “ More innovation and easier working especially with vendors and consumers”, “General employees have more knowledge of how things work through social media access”, “It has helped me effectively and efficiently to manage material and Human Resources and also increase productivity”. These results echoed with what many scholars have already found in the literature.

In more traditional environments, leadership still takes full control of strategic

decisions, limiting the potential of digital transformation. Despite many reluctant participants and skeptical point of views “Know my organization, it has not made any difference”, “I do not think it has influenced this, leaders still do what they want without employees input in a lot of corporate companies”, “I am not sure”, positive qualitative insights showed that the shift towards balance of power is not just theoretical it’s something already unfolding in daily work practices and a trend worth following up on.

Unfortunately, insufficient insights are at hand to come up with substantive data coming from younger generations to perform comparison, but further studies could find it interesting to explore generational attitudes towards balance of power in digital era and opinions on traditional hierarchies.

The conceptualization framework, as shown in chapter 2.1, visually explains the relationship between these variables. It doesn’t pretend to explain every situation in every organizational model, but it offers a meaningful conceptual way to understand how digital transformation is changing the way power works in organizations. What initially began as a theory is now taking shape as it is supported, challenged, and organized through real experience. This phase has shown that the conceptual model is progressively reflected in reality.

4.2 Results

Sub-Research Question One (Quantitative)

Quantitative Results. The following is the first research sub question: What are the main digital advancements that promote employee empowerment?

This question was answered by using quantitative data to identify between the different digital tools what were the ones which were the most impacting.

To address the first sub-research question quantitatively, a thorough questionnaire was sent and insights coming from 205 participants from the UK were analyzed. The main

digital advancements promoting employee empowerment will be demonstrated below.

The participants were provided with a set of 14 Likert-Scale questions, 4 of which determine the different aspects of empowerment through digital tools. Frequencies and scores of the 4 questions were calculated to evaluate access to digital tools, access to social media, access to information and access to knowledge. Results were as follows:

Questions	1	2	3	4	5
Digital tools have increased employees' independence in daily tasks.	24 (12%)	29 (14%)	54 (26%)	59 (29%)	39 (19%)
Access to online education has increased the development of employees' skills.	21 (12%)	18 (9%)	42 (23%)	67 (33%)	57 (24%)
Access to online information has increased the development of employees' knowledge.	12 (7%)	10 (6%)	37 (21%)	80 (35%)	66 (30%)
Visibility through social media platforms has increased employees' ability to influence leadership and organizational direction.	34 (17%)	27 (13%)	61 (30%)	51 (25%)	32 (16%)

Table 4.3 SQRI Scores & Frequencies

In order to better understand responses in Likert-Scale items, measures of central tendencies and variability were calculated. First, Likert scale scores and frequencies were transcript. Then, the weighted score was calculated which represents the score times the frequency. This is useful to calculate the Mean (M) which is the average response of all

participants in a survey. For example, a mean of 3.87 indicates that, on average, respondents tend to agree with the statement, leaning closer to “agree” than to “neutral.” After, there was enough data to calculate SD, “standard deviation”, indicating how much responses deviate from the mean (M). In simpler terms: If the SD is low, it means that most participants gave similar answers (their responses are close to the average). However, if the SD is high, it means responses were more spread out (participants had very different opinions).

Q1	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
Digital tools have increased employees' independence in daily tasks.	1	24	3,29	1,26
	2	29		
	3	54		
	4	59		
	5	39		
Q2	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
Access to online education has increased the development of employees' skills.	1	21	3,59	1,26
	2	18		
	3	42		
	4	67		
Q3	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
Access to online information has increased the development of employees' knowledge.	1	12	3,87	1,10
	2	10		
	3	37		
	4	80		
	5	66		
Q4	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
Visibility through social media platforms has increased employees' ability to influence leadership and organizational direction.	1	34	3,10	1,29
	2	27		
	3	61		
	4	51		
	5	32		

Table 4.4 SQR1 Means & Standard Deviation

Interpretation

In question 1, “Digital tools have increased employees’ independence in daily tasks”, mean is equal to 3.29 and Standard Deviation to 1,26. The average response is inclined toward agreement, indicating that many employees feel that digital tools are helping them become less reliant on everyday supervision. However, standard deviation is somewhat high 1,26. Standard Deviation is considered high when is above 1 (Pannell, 2023). This suggests that view around digital tools are not shared equally. Some employees were not affected by use of technological tools. This could reflect differing levels of digital literacy or variation in tool adoption across departments. In practical terms, 34% of leaders and 14% of employees either agreed or strongly agreed that digital tools increase employee autonomy.

Question 2 seeks to evaluate whether “Access to online education has increased the development of employees’ skills”. Mean is equal to 3,59 and SD to 1,26. Online education as an asset in the development of employees’ skills received greater agreement suggesting that online education is proving itself to be beneficial. 39% of leaders and 21% of employees agreed or strongly agreed that online education increases development of skills.

Question 3 assessed the benefits of access to information in the increase in the development of employees’ knowledge. Mean is equal to 3,87 and Standard Deviation is equal to 1,10. This question is the one who received the strongest agreement and displayed lower levels of variability among respondents. This view may point to a higher impact of development than using digital tools or self-education. 43% of leaders and 29% of employees agreed or strongly agreed.

Question 4 evaluated the ability of social media to influence leadership and organizational direction. Mean is equal to 3.10 and Standard Deviation is equal to 1,29.

This section had the lowest average of agreement and the highest variability rate. Respondents displayed a mitigated view on whether social media truly gives them influence or not. It also might signal generational or cultural differences given that younger employees are not significantly represented in this study.

Multiple Regression Test

After finding SD and M, a multiple regression test was conducted using Jamovi. The dependent variable chosen was question 14 and co-variables were questions 1,2,3,4,5. This helped to evaluate the relationship between them.

Linear Regression

Model	R	R ²
1	0.660	0.435

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=205

Coefficients du modèle - Q4_14 - Critère 14. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Digital technologies have reduced the traditional power gap between employees and leadership.

Prédicteur	Estimation	Erreur standard	t	p
Ordonnée à l'origine	0.9161	0.2276	4.024	<.001

Coefficients du modèle - Q4_14 - Critère 14. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Digital technologies have reduced the traditional power gap between employees and leadership.

Prédicteur	Estimation	Erreur standard	t	p
Q4_1 - Critère 1. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Digital tools (AI, collaborative tools, softwares, project management tools...) are part of my everyday work.	0.0588	0.0611	0.962	0.337
Q4_2 - Critère 2. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Digital tools have increased employee independence in daily tasks.	0.1774	0.0814	2.180	0.030
Q4_3 - Critère 3. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Access to online education, has increased the development of employees' skills.	- 0.2226	0.0791	- 2.815	0.005
Q4_4 - Critère 4. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Access to online information has increased the development of employees' knowledge.	0.3997	0.0932	4.288	<.001

Coefficients du modèle - Q4_14 - Critère 14. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Digital technologies have reduced the traditional power gap between employees and leadership.

Prédicteur	Estimation	Erreur standard	t	p
Q4_5 - Critère 5. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Visibility through social media platforms has increased employees' ability to influence leadership and organizational direction.	0.2810	0.0676	4.157	<.001

Table 4.5 SQRI Linear Regression

Estimation shows the regression coefficient; it tells the direction and the magnitude of each predictor's effect and impact. Standard error shows how much estimation varies from sample to another. P is used to estimate if the effect is statistically significant. T shows how many standard errors the estimate is away from zero and used to determine significance.

Interpretation

Predictors were assessed as having a real impact when $p < 0,05$ and no clear impact when $p > 0,05$. The higher the p-value, the less statistically significant the result is.

Digital tools as part of everyday work do not seem to have a high impact on participants' perceptions of power gap. Question 2 shows a higher agreement that

autonomy induced by the use of digital tools has narrowed power gap. Surprisingly, online education shows less agreement among participants. However, online information is a strong predictor. Answers show a stronger belief that it reduces power gap. Social media is also seen as reducing power gap.

Sub-Research Question Two (Quantitative)

Mixed-Method (Qualitative & Quantitative). The second sub-research question was intended to understand how empowerment is reflected in the reality of everyday corporate life. This question was answered using a mixed-method approach to demonstrate how the use of digital tools is impacting power dynamics in practice.

Quantitative approach. To address the second sub-research question quantitatively, a thorough questionnaire was sent and insights coming from 205 participants from the UK were collected. The main reasons that link employee empowerment to digital tools are detailed below:

Questions	1	2	3	4	5
1- Employees with strong knowledge are more likely to feel empowered at work.	7 (5%)	4 (2%)	28 (16%)	95 (47%)	71 (31%)
2- Employees with strong skills are more likely to feel empowered at work.	6 (5%)	3 (2%)	25 (12%)	86 (46%)	85 (36%)
3- Employees with strong visibility (active on social media) are more likely to feel empowered at work.	25 (14%)	39 (40%)	56 (30%)	44 (18%)	41 (18%)
4- In modern workplace, leadership involves skilled employees in decision-making processes.	6 (4%)	3 (2%)	41 (22%)	98 (48%)	57 (24%)
5- The company's culture and values contribute to giving employees a sense of power.	6 (4%)	9 (6%)	53 (27%)	78 (37%)	59 (23%)
6- In general, I believe that leaders and employees have comparable levels of knowledge and skills.	8 (4%)	16 (9%)	69 (39%)	71 (31%)	41 (18%)
7- In modern workplace, employees are able to express opinions openly and to contribute to innovation.	12 (7%)	14 (8%)	49 (25%)	79 (38%)	51 (22%)
8- In modern workplace, employees are able to express differing views from leadership.	15 (9%)	9 (6%)	59 (29%)	76 (35%)	46 (21%)
9- Digital technologies have reduced the traditional power gap between employees and leadership.	20 (12%)	20 (11%)	77 (40%)	54 (22%)	34 (15%)

Table 4.6 SQR 2 Scores & Frequencies

In order to develop an in-depth understanding of the feedback in Likert-Scale items, measures of central tendencies and variability were calculated like in sub-research question 1.

Q1	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
Employees with strong knowledge are more likely to feel empowered at work.	1	7	4	0,93
	2	4		
	3	28		
	4	95		
	5	71		
Q2	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
Employees with strong skills are more likely to feel empowered at work.	1	6	4,1	0,91
	2	3		
	3	25		
	4	86		
	5	85		
Q3	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
Access to online information has increased the development of employees' knowledge.	1	12	3,87	1,10
	2	10		
	3	37		
	4	80		
	5	66		

Q4	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
Employees with strong visibility (active on social media) are more likely to feel empowered at work.	1	25	3,18	1,29
	2	39		
	3	56		
	4	44		
	5	41		
Q5	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
In modern workplace, leadership involves skilled employees in decision-making processes.	1	6	3,96	0,90
	2	3		
	3	41		
	4	98		
	5	57		
Q6	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
The company's culture and values contribute to giving employees a sense of power.	1	6	3,85	0,98
	2	9		
	3	53		
	4	78		
	5	59		

Q7	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
In general, I believe that leaders and employees have comparable levels of knowledge and skills.	1	8	<i>3,59</i>	<i>1,02</i>
	2	16		
	3	69		
	4	71		
	5	41		
Q8	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
In modern workplace, employees are able to express opinions openly and to contribute to innovation.	1	12	<i>3,70</i>	<i>1,10</i>
	2	14		
	3	49		
	4	79		
	5	51		
Q9	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
In modern workplace, employees are able to express differing views from leadership.	1	15	<i>3,63</i>	<i>1,10</i>
	2	9		
	3	59		
	4	76		
	5	46		

Q10	Likert-Score	Frequency	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (D)
Digital technologies have reduced the traditional power gap between employees and leadership.	1	20	3,30	1,15
	2	20		
	3	77		
	4	54		
	5	34		

Table 4.7 SQR2 Means & Standard Deviations

Interpretations: Each of the above questions explores a different dimension of evolving power dynamics, ultimately leading or not to a balance which translates with a more shared distribution of influence.

Question 1 seeks to evaluate the impact of knowledge, as self-provoked quality, on sense of empowerment at work. With a high mean score (M=4) and a below 1 Standard Deviation (SD=0,93), the results indicate a strong inclination towards the importance of knowledge with empowerment. The tight diversity of opinions shows consensus in regard to knowledge as a solid foundation for power in modern business environment.

Question 2 tackled the subject of skills and their impact on sense of empowerment. Similarly to knowledge, skills show a high mean (M=4,1) indicating and participants agree with the statement. Low variability (SD=0,91) reinforces the idea that traditional hierarchies are shifting towards meritocracy recognition.

Question 3 explored the impact of visibility through social media on empowerment. The mean is lower than previous questions, indicating that participants have more neutral feedback. It also showed a higher variability (SD=1,29), suggesting this time mixed point of views about the relevance of visibility regarding power. In the

qualitative section, social media were seen as platforms giving employees opportunities to speak up but in the quantitative section, visibility does not seem to echo with power, yet.

Question 4, suggests that modern leaders include skilled employees in decision-making, giving workforce a more strategic role in a company. A mean of 3,96 suggests that participants agree with the statement and SD of 0,90 shows little difference in point of view. This supports the notion of power balance where decisions are more participatory and less top-down.

Question 5 seeks to explore how much a company's culture can act as an enabler to empowerment. In fact, a mean of 3,85 and SD=0,98 suggest that values and norms can strengthen employees. In digital era, digital tools can serve to amplify messages, transformation and communication across an organization.

Question 6 asks respondents to note whether employees and leaders' skills are at par. The mean score of 3.59 with an SD of 1,02 points to a moderate belief that leaders and employees share comparable competencies. The moderately widespread implies some skepticism probably from more traditional sectors.

Question 7 seeks to understand whether there is a general sense that employees can express opinions freely and contribute to innovation. With a mean of 3.70 and SD of 1.10, there's a general sense that employees can express opinions and contribute to innovation. However, the higher SD implies different experiences. This suggests that while the tools for expression exist, organizational openness to shared leadership may vary.

Question 8 evaluates the ability of employees to question and challenge leader's opinions. This scores moderately high with a M=3,63 and standard deviation=1,10. It

reflects that workplace is increasingly receptive to employees' opposition, however, it is not yet generalized.

Question 9 is the ultimate question that summarizes the theory this study wishes to build. It displayed the lowest mean of $M=3,30$ and a high $S.D=1,15$. This reveals a significant nuance about whether digital tools have truly impacted power gap. This may suggest that although autonomy, information, knowledge and social media are important factors, power gap is not completely narrowed.

These results indicate that there is a complex environment of a workplace in transition. There are strong indicators that knowledge, skills and information lead to power. Leadership appears to be adapting, involving skilled employees more and creating space for opinion-sharing. However, visibility and technology, while enabling factors, are not yet seen as equalizing power completely.

Multiple Regression Test

Modèle	R	R ²
1	0.687	0.472

Note. Models estimated using sample size of $N=205$

Coefficients du modèle - Q4_14 - Critère 14. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Digital technologies have reduced the traditional power gap between employees and leadership.

Prédicteur	Estimation	Erreur standard	T	p
Ordonnée à l'origine	0.06299	0.3203	0.1967	0.844
Q4_6 - Critère 6. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Employees with strong knowledge are more likely to feel empowered at work.	0.00904	0.1264	0.0715	0.943
Q4_7 - Critère 7. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Employees with strong skills are more likely to feel empowered at work.	0.22293	0.1346	1.6560	0.099
Q4_8 - Critère 8. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Employees with strong visibility (active on social media) are more likely to feel empowered at work.	0.29728	0.0560	5.3113	<.001

Coefficients du modèle - Q4_14 - Critère 14. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Digital technologies have reduced the traditional power gap between employees and leadership.

Prédicteur	Estimation	Erreur standard	T	p
Q4_9 - Critère 9. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - In modern workplace, leadership involves skilled employees in decision-making processes.	-0.04082	0.0934	-0.4373	0.662
Q4_10 - Critère 10. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - The company's culture and values contribute to giving employees a sense of power.	0.04373	0.0927	0.4718	0.638
Q4_11 - Critère 11. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - In general, I believe that leaders and employees have comparable levels of knowledge and skills.	0.03283	0.0741	0.4433	0.658

Coefficients du modèle - Q4_14 - Critère 14. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Digital technologies have reduced the traditional power gap between employees and leadership.

Prédicteur	Estimation	Erreur standard	T	p
Q4_12 - Critère 12. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - In modern workplace, employees are able to express opinions openly and to contribute to innovation.	0.17426	0.1052	1.6558	0.099
Q4_13 - Critère 13. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - In modern workplace, employees are able to express differing views from leadership.	0.15356	0.1017	1.5104	0.133

Table 4.8 SQR2 Linear Regression

Interpretation

A multiple regression test was run to see which digital tools factors have reduced the traditional power gap between employees and leadership.

The strongest and most surprising finding was that employees tend to believe that online visibility has reduced power gap. While descriptive results suggested low

relationship between empowerment and social media, the regression considered this relationship as statistically significant. This means that even if some employees do not feel empowered through social media, the ones who do, show a strong belief that visibility reduces hierarchical power.

Other factors arise, like having strong skills and having the ability to openly share opinions and contribute ideas. These showed a positive connection to power equity. However, they were not significant enough to be considered statistically important. Further thorough research should be conducted to be able to positively assert it. On the other hand, other predictors, like having strong knowledge, being involved in decision making, company culture, or whether employees feel equal to leaders in knowledge and skills didn't show a meaningful link to empowerment in the above analysis. In summary, being visible and active on social media seems to stand out among other digital tools.

Conclusion

In developing the concept of power balance, these findings support a reevaluation of authority in the digital age. Empowerment today is less about authority from formal positions and more about capability, collaboration, and connection. The evolving balance is not only a flattening of hierarchy, but rather, it is a redistribution of influence that

valuable contribution and collaboration over control and collective intelligence over individual success.

Organizations aiming to strengthen power balance should invest in knowledge sharing, encourage skill development, embrace participatory culture, and critically examine how digital tools are used and not just make them available.

Sub-Research Question Two (Qualitative)

Research Question	Themes used to address this question
How is empowerment reflected in the reality of everyday corporate life?	Theme 1 - Empowerment through autonomy Theme 2 – Balance and redistribution of power Theme 3 – Empowerment through access to information and resources Theme 4 – Communication and collaboration Theme 5 – Improved Productivity and management Theme 6 – Resistance and uncertainty

Table 4.9 SQR2 Themes

Theme 1- Empowerment through autonomy

15 participants shared their appreciation of digital tools as enablers of autonomy in their work. Replies indicate that employees feel empowered by the ability to access information “fast” and “easy”. In fact, employees have now access to company data and policies, allowing them to be more efficient on their own without the need for close supervision. As stated by Participant N.104 “Digital tools have influenced decision making in the following ways , employees are now able to access company data, policies etc more easily as well as information spreading now made easier also there's now greater

autonomy as employees can now make informed decisions and also take ownership of their work”. Participant 94 indicated that digital tools bring “Autonomy and flexibility, access to information and more inclusive in decision making”. Participant 149 specified that “less decisions need to go through management due to AI”. In this section the word “easier”/” easy” was mentioned 7 times highlighting the fact that accessibility of information is much appreciated and is a lever for autonomy.

Theme 2- Balance and redistribution of power

25 open-ended survey participants highlighted the transformation occurring in regards of workplace dynamics. Data indicates that transparency, access to information and necessary resources play a huge role in filling power gap. Employees now have easier and faster access to information. A privilege that was one traditionally confined within leadership. This allows employees not only to understand managerial decisions but also to have the necessary confidence to contribute meaningfully to them. Participant N. 39 specifically answered that “Educated employees feel empowered and as a manager you're more likely to listen to them”. This increased visibility into organizational processes has flattened traditional hierarchies and made it easier for employees, regardless of formal rank, to voice their perspective and challenge decisions. Participants 161 described how social media threatens traditional power “I think things like social media have changed the way leaders see employees as they have a voice to speak up, I think leaders are threatened a little by the change in digital tools as AI and access to education defeats the point of them having this knowledge”. Above answers highlight a shift towards share influence. Also, they highlight the fact that visibility and knowledge can be considered as challenges for traditional leaders.

Theme 3- Empowerment through access to resources

This theme has been mentioned more than 65 times in respondents’ feedback. In

fact, participants widely recognize the positive effect of digitally allowed flow of information and access to data in modern workplaces. Knowledge, information, data are indeed the new gold, and they can create great value (Van Laarhoven-Smits, 2023). Participant 28 indicated that “The more knowledge you have the more confidence you have”. Respondents indicated that in parallel to confidence, access to valuable insights strengthened their assertiveness, participant 57 indicated that with appropriate data one can take “decisive actions”. This power also increases productivity as participants feel more informed while speaking with clients or management. Participant 164 indicated that “It's made it easier to update your training, therefore puts the employee in a better position to talk to clients and management”. On the same note, participant 182 indicates that “Employees are able to educate themselves using digital tools and are able to input their ideas to their employers”. Rather than being mere executors, employees feel empowered to contribute meaningfully to the success of their organization. As several participants indicated, they have a deeper understanding of their role and of why decisions are taken. They can even challenge leadership when necessary. As participant 178 stated: “It's easier to locate resources that 'prove' a statement or position” and participant 12 indicates that thanks to digital tools, “employees have wider expertise to enable them to question leaders' decisions”. Ultimately, this analysis proves that knowledge is no longer limited to hierarchy but rather, it is a shared source of wealth that redefines codes of power.

Theme 4- Communication and Collaboration

Improved communication and collaboration were seen as ones of the most important transformative impacts of digital tools. They were indicated 38 times in respondents' replies. Respondents shared that communication and collaboration have broken down traditional barriers and made leaders more accessible. Participant 120 said

that “Digital tools have helped in reducing the barriers between hierarchies by enabling direct communication between higher levels and the lower levels of a company”.

Participant 109 shared experience about effect of communication on organizational structures saying that “Enhanced collaboration and communication... Collective tools, flattened hierarchies”. Others echoed similar views stating that digital tools “ allow employees to give their opinion publicly and to correct the higher ups in an organization much more easily” (Participant 43). Importantly, digital links are also seen to promote transparency, as mentioned by participant 123 “It promotes transparency and trustworthiness in information sharing”. Respondents also indicated that communication is easier and does not rely on formal channels. It also fosters a sense of “connectivity” as “knowledge is shared quickly” and grants openness to “different ideas and influences”.

The responses reflect a workplace environment where digital tools improved communication and created a sense of belonging between teams, hierarchies are softened, and transparency is reflected into daily operations. Thus, digital tools are not only improving how people communicate but it is also building bridges between employees and leaders and is actively redefining the nature of power and contribution in modern workspaces.

Theme 5- Improved Productivity

Participants in this study described more than 60 times and in different ways, the importance of digital tools on productivity. There is a tight link between the enlightened decision-making power granted by technology and productivity. Many respondents shared that technologies such as AI and other digital platforms shifted the decision-making power away from traditional hierarchies toward more empowered and informed workforce. Participant 35 indicates that digital tools “enable faster and better decision making by employees and leaders”. On the other hand, participant 37 stated: “I think with

employees having access to information that only leaders in companies had has shifted the dynamic, so all can benefit from improving the workplace, employees now have the capability to access information once reserved for leadership, equipping them to contribute meaningfully to workplace strategies and day-to-day operations”.

One recurring sentiment was that digital tools help employees work better and be more informed about their tasks. They also have made work easier. Participant 135 indicates that “It has resulted into better management and team development between leaders and employees”. Participant 16 raised a fundamental notion saying that, “Normal everyday staff are now able to complete more complex tasks, so give them more power.” This sense of empowerment extends beyond skills but also reflects increased confidence and ambition to contribute more meaningfully to the workplace.

Participants repeatedly praised the ability of digital tools to make them save time and enable them to make better decisions on richer and more accurate data. The simplification of reporting, the use of minutes of meetings, action plans, and automated summaries were all viewed as features that have enhanced operational fluidity. However, a few respondents did voice concerns, such as the replacement of workers, the unreliability of data and the coercion into using digital tools when it is not necessary. Participant 72 indicated that “leaders impose digital tools not knowing the real needs of employees, therefore employees encounter problems when tools don’t work as leaders do not listen to employees”. Yet, these views did not have an impact on the core insight: Digital tools have reshaped the modern workplace into a more informed, innovative and collaborative environment.

Theme 6- Resistance and Uncertainty

5 participants answered the Likert-scale questionnaire but not the open-ended questions. While many workplaces are embracing change and digital transformation,

there remains uncertainty about the ability of digital tools to empower employees and give them power to contribute meaningfully in workplace. In fact, some respondents had opposing views stating that “digital tools perpetuate a culture of exploitation” (participant 150), also that they have “enhanced power gap” or that digital tools make employees be “tracked online”. Other respondents offered a neutral reply such as “not sure” or “I have no idea”.

This resistance shows that empowerment thanks to technological advancement is not a universal experience. This can be due to generational differences or workplace environments who are still rooted in traditional power dynamics. Participant 23 stated that “My company still has a traditional manager v employee relationship”.

Critically, some respondents believe that AI is unreliable and untrustworthy. Participant 68 said that “AI has proven very unreliable and false”. It also might seem unfair as participant 151 states “one thing though that is very worrying in AI in which this could cause an employee who may cheat by using AI to do tasks to be promoted over an employee that uses their own mind.”

In summary, this section showed mixed views around employee empowerment. This stresses the point that technology alone does not balance power or impact decision-making, but rather this requires openness from employees and cultural change from organizations.

Qualitative Results. Employee empowerment is not a new subject nor are digital transformation or leadership. In fact, there are some scholars who wrote about the bottom-up shift of power (e.g: Barbara Kellerman, in her book “the end of leadership). Nevertheless, this study wishes to contribute to the understanding of employee empowerment as a tangible fact and not as an outcome of company philosophy or leadership style especially after COVID-19. Also, there is a lack of data about employee

awareness of their newly earned power and data about leaders' acceptance of this shift. Thus, the purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore whether digital tools impacted power dynamics or not.

4.3 Summary of Findings

Summary of Sub-Research Question 1 Findings

In this study, sub-Research Question 1 was, “what are the main digital advancements that promote employee empowerment?”. It aimed at assessing what are the main digital levers that give employees a sense of influence independently from company culture. This question was addressed in a quantitative way. The participants were given a questionnaire and among the questions, there were four Likert-Scale queries aiming at determining the main digital tools that are considered as enablers for employee empowerment.

The findings revealed a generally positive opinion about digital tools enhancing employee autonomy. Indeed, participants agreed that digital tools contribute to independence in daily tasks ($M = 3,9$). This suggests a growing disruption away from reliance on direct management and control. However, the standard deviation ($SD=1,26$) is relatively high and indicates a difference in participants' experiences. This might be due to digital literacy or unequal access across teams. In fact, 39% of participants who agree or strongly agree that digital tools are part of their everyday life, agree or strongly agree that it enhanced their independence. Only 8% of participants who agree or strongly agree that digital tools are part of their everyday life are neutral and 1% disagree.

Also, online education was seen as an important enabler of skill development ($M = 3,59$). This supports the idea that self-directed learning is becoming a critical lever of empowerment. But there again, variability ($SD = 1,26$) shows unequal engagement or access.

The most important consensus observed was regarding access to online information ($M = 3,87$, $SD = 1,10$). Respondents saw access to information as important source of growth. This suggests that having access to high-quality information and data empowers employees and might be even more effective than tools or online education alone.

As for the influence of social media as an empowering asset that influences leadership decisions, it showed the lowest mean score ($M = 3,10$) and the highest variability ($SD = 1,29$). This again suggests a high difference in views. Some employees see social media as an opportunity and a platform to speak up while others remain skeptical. This can indicate generational factors, or lack of trust in these platforms. 0% of participants from 18-24 years agreed or strongly agreed that social media influences leadership decisions, 14% of participants of 25-34 years agreed or strongly agreed and 13% of participants of 35-44 years of participants agreed or disagreed.

In summary, access to information, access to digital tools, and online education emerged as the most significant digital drivers of empowerment. While social media's role is still considered minimal, the overall data supports that digital advancement, when is accessible and rightly implemented can foster independence from managerial control, autonomy and optimized contribution to organizational success.

Summary of Sub-Research Question 2 Findings

Sub-Research Question 2 was: How is empowerment reflected in the reality of everyday corporate life? This question aimed to understand how empowerment is reflected in the context of increased digitalization. This question was handled in a quantitative and in a qualitative way.

As per the findings, a nuanced context emerged. In fact, while hierarchies are still maintained, a gradual redistribution of power is emerging.

The highest consensus observed is in question 1 regarding knowledge ($M = 4,00$, $SD = 0,93$). This supports the belief that in today's knowledge economy, access to reliable information is a fundamental source of power. Respondents emphasized during qualitative feedback that being informed not only enables better and faster decision-making, but it also enhances confidence and autonomy. Digital tools allow employees to access company data autonomously, lessening their reliance on managerial approval and control. This ultimately contributes to a more self-directed workforce.

Question 2 underlined the important role of skills in supporting empowerment ($M = 4,1$, $SD = 0,91$). Participants largely supported the idea that competency plays a crucial role in determining influence. The low variability shows that expertise is largely recognized and rewarded, further reducing the power gap. Performance and value creation are thus increasingly becoming the basis of decision-making authority.

Similarly to sub-research 1 question 4, question 3 relative to social media as a source of power showed more ambivalent results ($M = 3,51$, $SD = 1,29$). While some qualitative feedback suggested that social media platforms gave employees a voice, the overall sentiment remained skeptical. Participants' feedback indicated that social visibility doesn't necessarily translate into power or influence. At least, not yet.

Question 4 explored whether leaders are involving skilled employees in strategic decision-making. A strong mean and low variability ($M = 3,96$, $SD = 0,90$) suggest that there is a growing trust and consideration for employee expertise. Respondents' feedback show a shift toward participatory leadership. Contributions from across levels are increasingly sought and valued. This aligns with the concept of "balance of power," that this study explores, where decision-making is ultimately more distributed and collaborative thanks to employees' skills and autonomy.

Regarding question 5, participants mostly agreed that organizational culture influences empowerment ($M = 3,85$, $SD = 0,98$). Organizational values, norms, and digital inclusion encourage employee influence. Qualitative insights highlighted how digital platforms promote collaboration and communication by allowing faster, easier and more transparent communication across teams and across hierarchies.

Question 6 suggests moderate belief that leaders and employees possess equal set of skills ($M = 3,59$, $SD = 1,02$). Responses were relatively dispersed. This reflects skepticism about whether there is a parity in competencies. This dispersion might stem from a lack of recognition of such equivalence or from cultural norms resisting the idea of equal skills across hierarchy.

A moderate agreement was also noted in Question 7 aiming to assess the possibility for employees to express opinions and to contribute to innovation ($M = 3,70$, $SD = 1,10$). However, the variability of 1,10 indicates that such possibility is not uniform across organizations. Some participants in qualitative responses celebrated open communication and contribution to innovation while others believe that there is a limited acceptance as power is in the hands of leaders.

Question 8 ($M = 3,63$, $SD = 1,10$) sought to assess the capacity of employees to challenge leaders' decisions in modern workplace. Feedback further reinforced the trend toward participatory work cultures, where challenging leaders is becoming more accepted, albeit still not generalized. Some qualitative feedback show that knowledge and information are tightly linked to the ability to challenge and to present ideas with assertiveness.

The final question (Q9) revealed the most divergent views ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.15$). Participants were unsure whether digital tools have truly decreased traditional power gap between employees and leaders. While easy access to data and self-learning initiatives

were celebrated, many participants pointed out that decision-making initiatives remain largely in the hands of leaders.

4.4 Conclusion

This mixed-method research combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, seeks to explore whether visibility, access to knowledge, access to information, access to digital tools are reshaping power dynamics in the modern workplace. And if they are, how is this reflected in real life. Employee perceptions were collected through a rich qualitative insight from open-ended responses. This study provides valid indications that workplace is in transition, where power is gradually becoming accessible, decentralized and based on merit.

The data reveals the importance of knowledge and skills, overrunning at times formal rank and authority. They now serve as essential levers of empowerment. Employees feel more capable, autonomous, and assertive when they can access valid information independently. The highest level of agreement in this study is centered around this well-known fact: knowledge is power, and in the most impactful way, digital era is providing different tools that are making it a reality.

At macro level, the study reveals a more complex and ambiguous bigger picture. While employees largely agree that their power of influence has increased through access to digital resources and more participatory leadership, there are still doubts around how far that influence truly extends. Not all organizations and even not all employees are equally receptive or willing to change. While some companies have embraced this shift by fostering inclusion and shared leadership, others remain attached to comforting traditional top-down models where decision-making power remains concentrated at the top and imposed to teams.

As for visibility through social media platforms, it is not yet widely recognized as a factor for real influence and power. Employees see the opportunity to share ideas more freely and recognize that this made leaders appear more accessible. However, not all have identified that these platforms have the potential to substantially narrow the power gap. The findings also highlight a certain resistance or mistrust among some employees who view digital tools as intrusive, threatening to job security, unreliable or even as means to further control them. This indicates that empowerment is not only technological but is a process that necessitates cultural change.

Overall, this study supports the concept of balance of power, not as a reality yet but as an emerging fact. The idea that modern workplaces are evolving from hierarchical systems to shared influence systems is being accelerated by the emergence of new technologies. In this new context, empowerment is increasingly linked to capability, skills, willingness, collaboration, and connectivity rather than position alone. However, this shift is unequal and is connected to organizational willingness to embrace new models of leadership, transparency, and employee inclusion. The research summary based on the collected insights, implications, conclusions, and further recommendations will be detailed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This study seeks to explore whether newly earned capacities thanks to access to digital tools have altered power dynamics between leaders and employees. While employee empowerment is traditionally seen as emerging from qualitative leadership and successful organizational strategies, few studies exist that recognize power as a fact that forces cultural and organizational change. In order to gather reliable information, a mixed-method approach was applied. First, qualitative and quantitative secondary data were collected to lean on other professionals' and scholars' expertise. This was a first step to show current trends and collect indicators on global employee relationship to work. This first step was necessary to prove the need for the study. The second step consisted in gathering primary data from 205 participants in the UK. Participants came from different backgrounds and companies, also they were from different generations. The objective was to prove a general concept that explains the reasons behind the global dissatisfaction with traditional employment, rather than gathering insights from a particular industry. This study revealed major shifts and identified growing trends. Similar studies in literature included recommendations for improving organizational structures (e.g flattened hierarchies) and making them more inclusive in order to sustain and thrive in a VUCA world. This chapter contains a discussion of the findings, of the data collected along with the association of these perceptions with the broader organizational and behavioral theories in previous research. This strategy opens the door to wider discussions, visionary projections and optimization of employment value proposition.

5.1 Discussion of Results

The results indicate that digital tools have clarified each party's responsibilities and gave employees confidence in their relationship with both customers and leadership. It developed their assertiveness by giving them necessary resources to self-develop and the ability to efficiently contribute to innovation.

Collaborative digital tools also paved the way to open communication and collaboration. They helped bridge communication gaps between levels of authority and employees as leaders seemingly appear to be more accessible.

Moreover, access to continuous learning and AI-driven insights have empowered employees in rendering them more autonomous. This makes them less reliant on management assistance or control. General feeling indicates that employees are now more aware and can contribute to the “whys” and are not mere applicants of the “what’s”. According to McLean & Company (2025), only 53% of employees understand key decisions taken by their leaders, proving that communication is not yet fluid and showing the opacity of decision making. This shows that current organizations are not yet fully embracing new capabilities and aspirations of employees.

While expressing some concerns and doubts about the reliability of AI in certain contexts, the overall sentiment suggested that these platforms have contributed to a more balanced and participatory power structure and that they shifted leadership from being a directive one to a more strategic and collaborative one.

Finally, participants praised the easy accessibility of information and the ability to make enlightened decisions faster. All the above values created by use of technological tools support productivity and inclusivity and ultimately prove themselves to be essential for business growth and continuity.

5.2 Discussion of Research Question One

The findings from Sub-Research Question 1 indicate that digital tools, when accessible and implemented in an appropriate way, become key enablers to employee empowerment. The results suggest that the availability of information, online education (knowledge), and digital work tools enhance autonomy, competence, and influence. They concede with theories indicating that the world is moving from a knowledge society to a learning society (Silva and Garcia, 2019). This empowered behavior allows to believe that it will be increasingly significant along with the increasing availability of information and governmental initiatives previously seen in this study.

The high mean score regarding access to digital tools ($M = 3.9$) aligns with contemporary views of the workplace as increasingly decentralized. Examples were previously given of companies where control is diffused between leaders and employees rather than imposed through hierarchy. The relatively high standard deviation ($SD = 1.26$), however, reflects an uneven experience. The origin of this variability could come from differences in digital literacy, job requirements or organizational readiness. This supports theories developed by previous studies that strategic flexibility is necessary to foster positive effects of technological capability and innovation (Zhou and Wu, 2010). When strategic flexibility is high, technological capabilities are high. Thus, technology alone cannot empower employees, it has to be supported by leaders.

Access to online information ($M = 3.87$) received the strongest consensus, indicating that employees see the capacity to autonomously access relevant data as more powerful than access to tools or formal education. This reinforces the idea given at the International Day for Universal Access to Information in 2023 that reconfirmed that digital connectivity and free access to information are fundamental for sustainability and

development (UNESCO, 2023). When employees can access information independently without control of management and independently take the knowledge they need, they are more likely to make decisions and contribute to a company's success meaningfully. This echoes with contemporary theories claiming that digital tools like AI are democratizing knowledge (Pittman, 2024).

Online education ($M = 3.59$) was also viewed positively by respondents. This suggests that self-directed learning is an increasingly chosen path for self-development and empowerment. This finding supports theories around the importance of continuous learning and employee-led education to companies (Reiners, 2022). However, the variability rate in responses show potential inequities in motivation, capacities or time availability. These aspects must be addressed if companies wish to build a culture of empowerment.

On the other hand, the role of social media in influencing leadership decisions and empowering employees ($M = 3.10$) was met with somewhat doubts and skepticism. This result, coupled with the highest variability ($SD = 1.29$), suggests an interesting divergence in belief about the role played by public platforms as an amplifier for employee voice. Surprisingly, younger participants (ages 18–24) showed no belief in social media's influence. This challenges ideas about digital-native generations who are being inherently empowered through online channels. This could indicate an increased awareness on how organizations and laws respond to social visibility and public dissing. In fact, posting online does not always induce change or can even fire back on the person who posted. It forces to evaluate whether digital empowerment is not just generational, but rather contextual, influenced by organizational culture and risk. However, participants of 18-24 were limited in number ($n=4$), other studies can benefit from conducting insightful studies across generations.

The discussion underlines that there is a growing divergence between traditional authority and employee skills. As employees gain access to the same tools once reserved to leadership a new form of shared leadership is emerging. One that is not limited to formal rank but to contributions. Organizations navigate a volatile and complex environment, and this shift offers an opportunity for companies to embrace employees' power and encourage it. This might be considered as a competitive advantage as digital advancement does not guarantee access alone but needs to be supported by leadership.

5.3 Discussion of Research Question Two

The findings from research Question 2 shed light on how digitalization is playing an important role in giving employees power independently from leaders' initiative. This is reshaping power dynamics within modern organizations as organizations are forced to adapt and move away from traditional dynamics. Consistent with research in previous studies, knowledge remains the pillar of employee ability to influence. As observed in respondents feedback, access to reliable information in an easy and timely manner, enhances employees' autonomy, confidence, and decision-making capacity. This echoes with Silva and Garcia's (2019) argument that organizations empower individuals when they encourage continuous knowledge flow and with Reisinger and Fetterer (2021) statement that employees want autonomy rather than flexibility. This supports the shift from traditional hierarchical control to a more distributed, shared and collective power that fosters collective intelligence.

There is a strong emphasis on skills as a driver of empowerment. In fact, participants believe that competency is at the heart of power. This resonates with modern studies around skills-based organizations who encourage potential and ongoing development rather than merely exploiting existing skills (Parisot, 2025), paralleling with

other studies claiming that meritocracy in the modern world should be about potential and emotional intelligence rather than performance (Andrews, 2025).

Despite all research claiming that younger generations are smarter thanks to the internet (LaunchX, 2023) and other research indicating that people are increasingly thriving to be their own leader (Embroker team, 2025), there is skepticism about whether leaders and employees truly share parity in skills. This highlights the cultural aspect of leadership where leaders are still seen by skilled employees as individuals of higher intelligence.

Regarding social media's role, there is a clear ambivalence in responses. While digital platforms can amplify employee voices and give them direct access to their leaders and visibility, this study confirms that visibility is still not yet embraced by employees. Trust and generational factors could hinder the extent to which social media is used by employees.

The growing inclusion of skilled workforce in strategic decision-making and the increasing challenge of leadership decisions reflect the importance of change management in organizations for transformation, as noted by contemporary professionals (Schneider, 2023). However, the variability in responses signals that these cultural changes are unevenly adopted.

Finally, the vagueness surrounding the claim that digital tools have effectively reduced the traditional power gap shows that while technology can democratize access to information and bring genuine empowerment, this is not organically reflected in organizations.

Overall, this research both confirms and challenges concept of power balance. By illustrating that digital advancements serve as important enablers for empowerment, they are not sufficient to provoke a balance. Holistic progress requires a global approach that

combines inclusive organizational cultures and employees' awareness towards their own strength.

CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary

This research sought to explore if in the era of digitalization, power leans to be symmetrical, forcing leadership to be reimagined. The findings in secondary and primary data paint a rather complex and ambiguous reality.

The first sub-research question demonstrated that when digital tools are implemented in an effective and efficient way, they foster employee autonomy and encourage collaboration and communication. As noted by participants, there is a better comprehension of individuals' responsibilities which improves productivity in a collective way. There is a better understanding of decision root cause, better knowledge of the products to be sold, thus, digital tools ultimately lead to better customer service. Access to information was clearly the most valued element, even more than online education or digital tools. These findings echo with the shift toward a "learning society", where knowledge is a continuous endeavor. However, there was a relatively high variability in responses. This points toward structural inequalities in digital literacy, personal motivation, and time resources.

The second research question that combined qualitative and quantitative data, shed light on a broader shift in power dynamics. Digitalization is in fact decentralizing power, encouraging employee initiatives, autonomy, innovation and introducing new forms of shared leadership. Yet, there is a notable skepticism about whether employees truly feel empowered, especially through channels like social media. Generational, cultural, and organizational factors seem to mediate this perceived empowerment. These findings underline that empowerment is rather contextual, situational and cannot be assumed to flow naturally from digital access and new technological tools.

While balance is not yet fully implemented, it is promising. Power balance requires more than employee autonomy, knowledge, information and visibility. It requires a deep intention from employees to be empowered along with the support of **leaders**. Surprisingly, the more leadership concept feels obsolete the more it proves its importance. If leadership ought to be reimagined in a perfect world, leaders would be equileaders leading employeers. An equileader will not be leading with authority nor with superiority, it is rather a role for purpose. An equileader promotes equity in decision-making, builds inclusive leadership rather than imposing top-down decisions, he fosters an environment where employees are actively involved in business life with passion and with customer satisfaction at heart. When leadership loses its relationship to power, real leaders will arise. Previous studies indicate that employees involved in decision making have higher job satisfaction and a stronger feeling of belonging (Ogu, 2024). If leadership ought to be reimagined in digital era, this is how leaders could clock build and lead present generations and future ones. As Franck Buckminster stated: *“You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete”* (Goodreads, n.d). Among all highly intelligent and brilliant individuals shaping today’s workforce, the leader is the one who thrived for it the most, who really earned it and the one who is willing to exert power while embracing others’ power. An equileader is confident enough to be led, to be inspired and motivated by his own teams. He drives by compassion and has a deep commitment to see others succeed.

6.2 Implications

The findings of this research carry important inputs for both theory and practice. Whether in organizational structures, change management, digital transformation or HR. At the heart of these implications, there is a significant change: employee empowerment

in the digital era is not simply about access to technology or about flattened structures, but rather, it is about the ability to acknowledge digital tools as power enablers and embrace change. It is also to acknowledge that employees' mindsets and capacities have changed.

The research contributes to contemporary research by adding to the richness of theories around digital empowerment, shared leadership and employee-ship. It further confirms arguments in regard to the transition from a knowledge-based society to a learning based one (Silva & Garcia, 2019). It also challenges generational assumptions in particular belief that younger generations feel empowered thanks to their digital literacy. This invites scholars and professionals to further explore empowerment not solely as the outcome of access to digital tools but as a result of better organizational processes, rather as a socio-cultural process influenced by deeply rooted beliefs.

For practitioners, the implications are in regard to employee empowerment as digital tools do not create value alone. They need a certain strategy to be implemented successfully, they need flexibility in embracing the value of employees' voice and learning capacities. Without this strategic vision of digital resources, they risk being misaligned with organizational objectives. Leadership must evolve from control to enablement, as power is no longer at the hand of the few at the top but distributed thanks to collective competence. Furthermore, the skepticism around social media as power enabler must be reevaluated for it to be safe and impactful both for workforce and for the company.

Also, this research demonstrates that power is not given, nor is it won, it is cultivated with time and a product of initiative. Leaders must intentionally bring down the walls to better engage with employees. As for employees, they should take into consideration that when carefully used, their power can further push their company to

thrive. To sustain in a VUCA world, companies need to foster the right environment for “employeers”, employees of the digital era, with leadership capacities, equally visionaries, capable of innovation and fully implicated in the vision and in the objective of the company. Only then can the full potential of digital transformation reach its peak and power balance be realized.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Given the dynamic and constantly evolving business environment continuous research is necessary to predict trends and point out risks. Moreover, future studies should have a more representative sample size. For this research, sample size was 205, and generational difference in opinions could not be evaluated. There were limits in time and resources. Future studies would benefit of higher representation of every generation in order to draw comparisons.

Also, longitudinal research design can give a better understanding of the impacts of digital tools on organizational dynamics on the long run. Especially with the continuous disruptions of technological tools in businesses.

Industries are impacted by technology in different ways, future research can focus on specific industries such as health care, IT, or even public bodies.

This study tackled cultural and emotional subjects, ones linked with collective beliefs, trust and motivation. To better understand this sensitive topic, psychological research can be conducted on the psychological impacts of business digital tools and empowerment.

Further ethical considerations of digital empowerment can be conducted. Especially with the ability given by digital tools to voice concerns.

Continued quantitative and qualitative research will be essential to guide organizations in designing proper organizational structures and adapt leadership accordingly.

Finally, future research can be conducted to study the effect of augmented era (combination between Robots and Humans, (Toolify.ai, 2023)) on power dynamics.

6.4 Conclusion

Research about “reimagining leadership in the era of balance of power” has shown that digital transformation is not just a technological evolution facilitating work. It is a deep human revolution that challenges deeply rooted beliefs and leadership models. It also challenges traditional power dynamics, putting employees and leaders at the same level in terms of knowledge and skills. Digital tools offer illimited access to information that was never granted before and it is highly praised by employees. “Empowered Employeeeship leads to usage of full potential a company possess in its people” (NACSHR, 2024). But, while digital technology grants power to employees, this is not naturally felt in the workplace yet. Digital technologies are not enough. In order to reach a full transformation, there must be a shift in mindsets. There must be a shift from leadership to “equileadership” and a shift from employees to “employeadership”. True transformation demands a shift in approaches: from hierarchical control to shared leadership, from passive digital access to proactivity, and from isolated knowledge to collective intelligence and mutual motivation. Leaders must therefore express a new kind of strength: one that embraces employees’ voice and capabilities and sees workforce empowerment not as a threat but as a competitive advantage.

As organizations will continue to navigate in an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world, companies need to attract talents, retain clients and thrive. Therefore, they should reinforce employment value offer and cultivate

empowered, informed, and purpose-driven workforce. This study contributes to modern reflections on leadership in digital times and offers a call to action: To “equilead” “employeaders” and design workplaces where power is shared.

Below are some KPIs that can be implemented in order to elevate empowerment of employees:

- 5- Decision-Making Participation Rate:** Calculate the percentage of employees who qualitatively participate in decision making. For example, companies can calculate the number of employees who participate in decision-making committees, who attend strategic meetings and give valuable input.

Participation Rate (%) = (Number of employees involved in decision-making/Number of eligible employees) x100

- 6- Digital Autonomy Index:** Calculate the percentage of employees who have access to digital tools and information leading them to work autonomously.

Component	Likert-Scale Score	Employee Score
Access to the necessary digital tools	0-5	5
Ability to work remotely	0-5	4
Access to performance indicators and necessary dashboards	0-5	3
Ability to take-decision autonomously	0-5	2
Reception of relevant updates (top-down flow of information)	0-5	1
TOTAL	0-25	15

Table 6.1 Digital Autonomy Index

Normalization of the score : $DAI = (\text{employee score} / \text{maximum score}) \times 100$

For example : $15/25 \times 100 = 60\%$

There is a possibility to get a more global index across teams.

Finally, in the world of comic books, superheroes are indicators that when a single figure holds all the power, others rely on him to rescue them and ultimately become vulnerable. In the business world of the digital era, this does not represent the decline of fictional heroes, but a general awakening around the unfulfillment coming from the centralized top-down power of traditional leadership. Historically, leaders were viewed as reliable figures responsible for holding knowledge, decision-making, and driving strategy, while followers were expected to execute tasks with limited interference. However, this hierarchical model is increasingly incompatible with the expectations of the modern workforce, particularly among generations to whom autonomy became the new standard. Today, the concentration of power is neither productive nor desired. The tripartite relationship of leadership, digital advancements and employee empowerment is redistributing power across all levels of an organization. Modern skilled employees no longer aspire to be led by a “Superman”, a solitary person at the top of a pyramid, whose real identity is known by a privileged few and who possesses extraordinary powers. Rather, they seek inclusion, valorization, co-creation, development and most of all, instead of praising another person’s powers, they wish to reveal their own.

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APPENDIX A

DATA COLLECTION

To collect quantitative and qualitative primary data for this study, a structured recruitment and survey distribution process was implemented. The researcher began by identifying professional companies, based in France that are carefully following GDPR regulations and specifically experienced in conducting doctoral level studies. When the company was selected and after discussion with customer support team, it was concluded that among France, UK and Italy, the study will be conducted in the UK in order to avoid language barriers. After carefully designing the questionnaire, the research operation was handled to the company from A to Z. The instrument was sent via email, along with population size and characteristics including the DPO of the company to make sure no sensitive questions were asked. It can be noted that this is a convenient sampling based on availability and the willingness of participants to answer. Then, the survey was sent via a platform to the panel, the latter had 2 weeks to answer. However, there was no need to send reminders as responses were collected relatively quickly. Once responses were ready, the researcher received an email and could retrieve answers via the platform. KPIs and different information were handed, although helpful, data was not exploitable as such, it they needed prior cleaning.

Respondents were selected on a voluntary basis, and only those who read and electronically signed the informed consent form were granted access to the full survey. Participants were assured of anonymity, data confidentiality.

No participant had a prior professional or personal relationship with the researcher. Communications with the company were documented. These measures were implemented to uphold research integrity, protect participant rights, and support the academic precision of this DBA student.

APPENDIX B

INSTRUMENTATION

The research approach used for this study is a mixed-method research design, aiming to understand if information and digital transformation induced a balance of power between employees and leaders. Four constructs were studied: “empowerment through use of digital tools”, “empowerment through knowledge”, “empowerment through information” and “empowerment through access to social media”, this will help assess the impact of visibility on empowerment.

This chapter explains thoroughly the quantitative and qualitative survey used to collect the data. Description includes instrument development, pretesting, content, and administrative procedures.

The quantitative survey was made of 3 demographic variables (age, leadership or employment role, size of the company), along with 14 closed questions with 5 point Likert scales opinion-based statements. The rationale behind the use of 14 questions is to maintain comfort of participants while capturing the strength of the agreement. Average response time was 00h04min12s and 96,7% of participants completed the whole process. As for the qualitative survey, it was composed of one open-ended question to collect other ideas and gain thoughtful perspectives. This method allowed to gather a comprehensive and in-depth outlook on the relevance of the theory proposed in this study. Together, these instruments allowed a comprehensive exploration of the research problem and questions.

The next step consisted in calculating appropriate sample size using G*Power tool. A priori analysis was used and F test for testing how the multiple predictors (information, knowledge, digital tools and visibility) impact Balance of Power. An effect

size of 0.5 was chosen to aim for moderate effect and a 0.95 statistical power to detect real relationships if they are present.

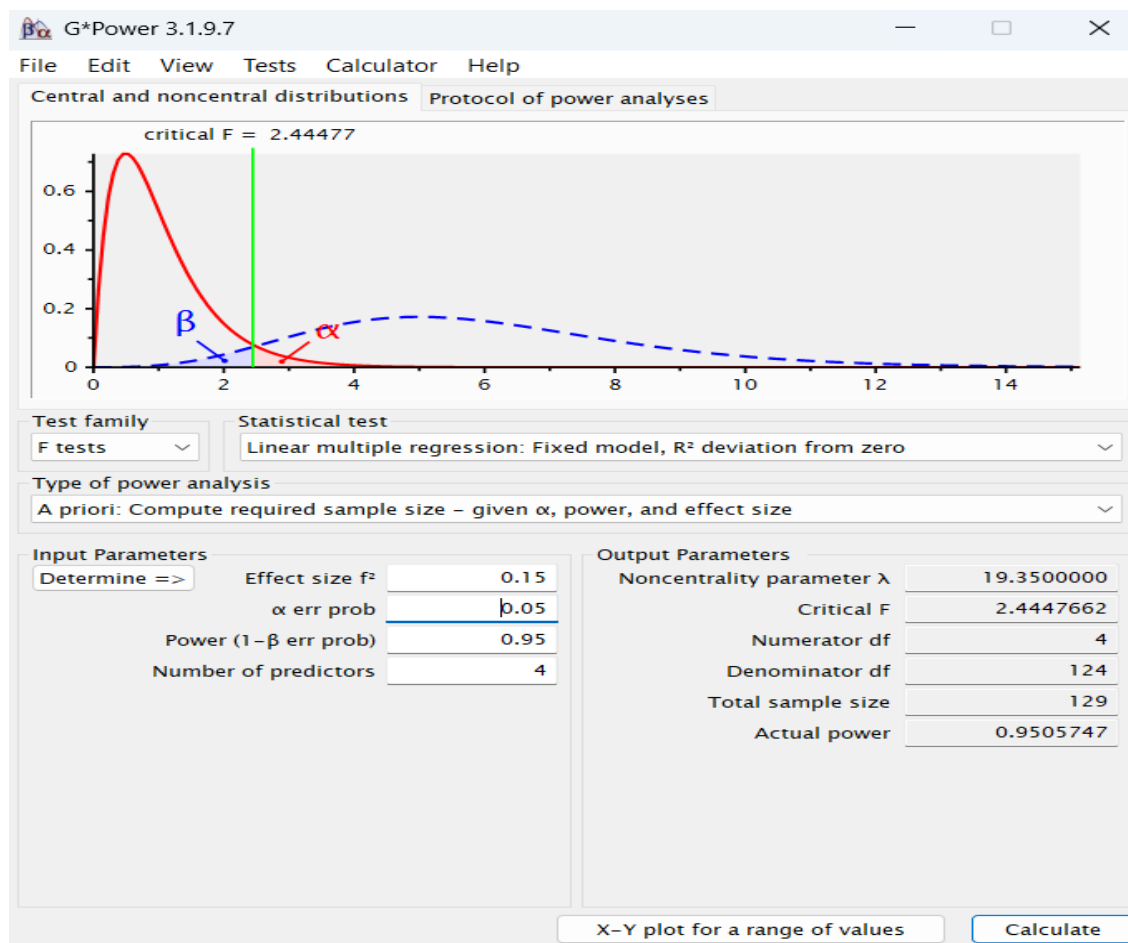


Figure 6.1 G Power Analysis

APPENDIX C
QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction note:

“First of all, thank you for your participation!

This survey is part of a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) thesis that aims to understand how digital transformation is influencing power dynamics between leaders and employees in modern workplace. Your participation is voluntary and by providing your responses, you consent to your feedback (excluding personal data) being processed for academic research purposes by the author of the thesis.”

Section 1: Demographic section

Questions	One single answer possible
Age Group	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-56 65+
Size of the company you work for	1-10 employees 11-50 employees 51-200 employees 201-500 employees 501-1000 employees 1001+ employees

Do you currently hold a leadership or managerial position with your organization?	Yes No
---	-----------

Section 2: Quantitative Likert-Scale questionnaire

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:	Likert Scale
Digital tools (AI, collaborative tools, softwares, project management tools...) are part of my everyday work	Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
Digital tools have increased employee independence in daily tasks.	Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
Access to online education has increased the development of employees' skills.	Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral

	Agree Strongly agree
4- Access to online information has increased the development of employees' knowledge.	1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Neutral 4) Agree 5) Strongly agree
5- Visibility through social media platforms has increased employees' ability to influence leadership and organizational direction	1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Neutral 4) Agree 5) Strongly agree
6- Employees with strong knowledge are more likely to feel empowered at work.	1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Neutral 4) Agree 5) Strongly agree
7- Employees with strong skills are more likely to feel empowered at work.	1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Neutral 4) Agree 5) Strongly agree
8- Employees with strong visibility (active on social media) are more likely to feel empowered at work.	1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Neutral

	4) Agree 5) Strongly agree
9- In modern workplace, leadership involves skilled employees in decision-making processes.	1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Neutral 4) Agree 5) Strongly agree
10- The company's culture and values contribute to giving employees a sense of power.	1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Neutral 4) Agree 5) Strongly agree
11- In general, I believe that leaders and employees have comparable levels of knowledge and skills.	1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Neutral 4) Agree 5) Strongly agree
12- In modern workplace, employees are able to express opinions openly and to contribute to innovation.	1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Neutral 4) Agree 5) Strongly agree
13- In modern workplace, employees are able to express differing views from leadership.	1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Neutral

	4) Agree 5) Strongly agree
14- Digital technologies have reduced the traditional power gap between employees and leadership.	1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Neutral 4) Agree 5) Strongly agree

Then a linear regression using Jamovi a free online tool, was conducted. The excel sheet was downloaded, the dependent variable was indicated as being question number 14.

Section 2: Qualitative Open- ended Survey

In what ways, if any, do you think digital tools (ex: AI, collaborative tools, access to education, access to information, social media platforms) have influenced decision-making power between leaders and employees in the modern workplace?

APPENDIX D

PRIVACY POLICY

A privacy policy is made available for participants in which they are informed of the company's mission. It also explains the use of the data collected from partner companies. It reminds participants that their participation is voluntary and that they can exit the questionnaire anytime just by leaving the page.

Finally, it informs them that they can exercise their rights (ex: rectifying or deleting...) by contacting the company. DPO's e-mail was shared for further assistance..

CRONBACH ALPHA CALCULATION

```
✓ [6] from google.colab import files
18 s uploaded = files.upload()
```

Sélect. fichiers

Survey python csv.csv

- **Survey python csv.csv**(text/csv) - 9225 bytes, last modified: 10/08/2025 - 100% done
Saving Survey python csv.csv to Survey python csv (2).csv

```
df = pd.read_csv('Survey python csv.csv', encoding='latin1')
df.head()
```

```
[12] df = pd.read_csv('Survey python csv.csv', encoding='latin1')
df.head()
```

[illegible]

(4)

			Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Access to online education	level of agreement with the following statements: - Employees with strong skills are more likely to feel empowered at work.q04_8 - Critère 8: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Employees with strong visibility (active on social media) are more likely to feel empowered at work.q04_9 - Critère 9: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - In modern workplace	statements: - In modern workplace	gap between employees and leadership.
0	1,4,4,4,4,4,4,4,4,3,5,4,5,3	NaN	NaN	NaN	NaN	NaN
1	2,4,4,5,5,5,5,5,5,5,5,5,5	NaN	NaN	NaN	NaN	NaN
2	3,4,4,2,2,2,4,3,3,4,3,3,4,4	NaN	NaN	NaN	NaN	NaN
3	4,4,4,3,4,3,4,3,4,3,5,4,4,2	NaN	NaN	NaN	NaN	NaN
4	5,4,4,4,4,4,4,5,4,4,4,4,5,4	NaN	NaN	NaN	NaN	NaN

Étapes suivantes : [Générer du code avec df](#) [Afficher les graphiques recommandés](#) [New interactive sheet](#)

```

import pandas as pd
import numpy as np

df = pd.read_csv('Survey python csv.csv', encoding='latin1', sep=None, engine='python')
df_split = df.iloc[:,0].str.split(';', expand=True)
df_split = df_split.apply(pd.to_numeric, errors='coerce')

def cronbach_alpha(df):
    df_corr = df.corr()
    k = df.shape[1]
    mean_corr = df_corr.values[np.triu_indices(k, 1)].mean()
    alpha = (k * mean_corr) / (1 + (k - 1) * mean_corr)
    return alpha

alpha = cronbach_alpha(df_split)
print("Cronbach's alpha:", alpha)

```

Cronbach's alpha: 0.9141061517965093

Table 6.2 Cronbach's Alpha Calculation

APPENDIX F

LINEARITY ASSUMPTIONS TESTS FOR SURVEY QUESTIONS

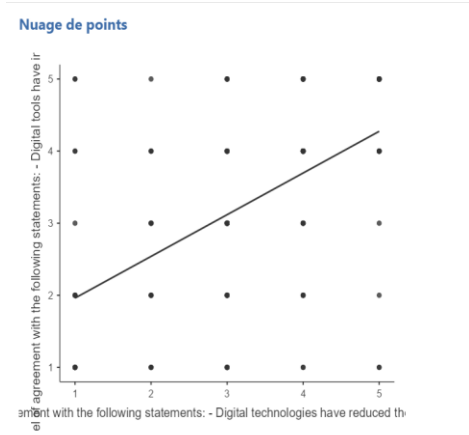


Figure. Axe X (Q14) – Axe Y (Q2)

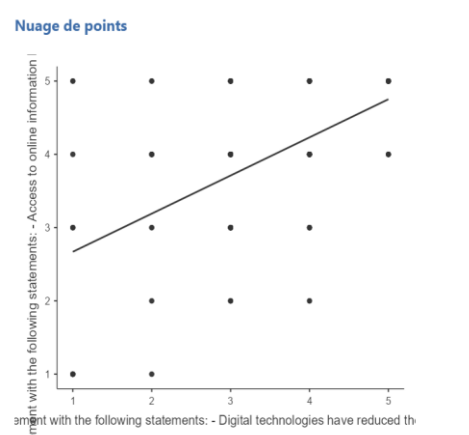


Figure. Axe X (Q14) – Axe Y (Q4)

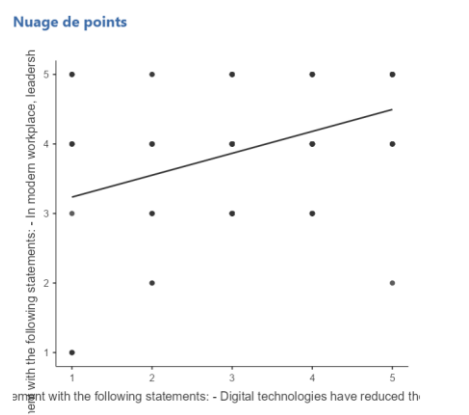


Figure. Axe X (Q14) – Axe Y (Q9)