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DIGITAL LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE WELLBEING IN HYBRID WORK MODELS: LESSONS FROM NIGERIA SMES

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Abstract

The growing adoption of digital technologies and flexible work arrangements has increased the importance of effective leadership and employee wellbeing in modern organisations. This study examined the influence of digital leadership on employee wellbeing in hybrid work models among Nigerian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Employing a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 215 employees of SMEs using a structured questionnaire titled Digital Leadership and Employee Wellbeing in Hybrid Work Questionnaire (DLEWHWQ), validated with a reliability coefficient of 0.89. Data analysis was conducted using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that digital communication and technological support significantly influence employee wellbeing among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models. The study also found that digital leadership practices significantly influence employees' work-life balance. The study concludes that effective digital leadership is essential for supporting employee wellbeing and maintaining healthy work-life balance in hybrid work environments. It recommends that Nigerian SMEs strengthen digital communication and technological support while adopting flexible leadership practices that promote manageable workloads, employee autonomy and clear boundaries between work and personal life.

Keywords: Digital Leadership, Employee Wellbeing, Hybrid Work Models, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises.

Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technology has changed the way organisations communicate, coordinate activities and manage employees. The traditional workplace, where employees are expected to perform their duties entirely within the organisational premises, is increasingly giving way to more flexible arrangements that combine physical and remote work. One of the most visible outcomes of this change is the emergence of hybrid work models, where employees divide their working time between the office and other locations, often their homes. While hybrid work offers flexibility and can improve employees' control over their work, it also creates new demands for organisations and their leaders. Effective leadership is therefore becoming increasingly important in ensuring that the benefits of digital and hybrid work do not come at the expense of employees' wellbeing (Cortellazzo, Bruni, & Zampieri, 2019; Contreras, Baykal, & Abid, 2020; Efimov et al., 2022).

Digital leadership involves the ability of leaders to use digital technologies effectively while guiding employees, coordinating organisational activities and responding to changes in the modern work environment. It goes beyond the mere use of technology and includes effective digital communication, technological competence, trust, employee support, adaptability and the ability to create a collaborative work environment. Cortellazzo, Bruni, and Zampieri (2019) explain that digital transformation requires leaders to develop new competencies that enable them to manage technological changes while maintaining effective relationships with employees. Similarly, Contreras, Baykal, and Abid (2020) observe that virtual leadership requires trust, communication and appropriate technological support because physical distance can affect employees' sense of connection with their organisations. Efimov et al. (2022) further found that leadership in virtual work environments is associated with employee wellbeing and job satisfaction, while effective leadership can help reduce psychological strain. These findings show that leadership has become an important factor in determining how employees experience digitally mediated work.

The emergence of hybrid work models has further increased the importance of digital leadership and employee wellbeing. Hybrid work can provide employees with greater flexibility, autonomy and opportunities to balance their professional and personal responsibilities. However, it can also create challenges such as excessive digital communication, technology-related stress, social isolation, increased workload and difficulty separating work from personal life. Wang, Liu, Qian, and Parker (2021) identify work design, social support, autonomy and effective communication as important factors influencing employees' experiences in remote working environments. Hybrid work can produce both positive and negative effects on employee health and wellbeing depending on how it is organised and supported (Dale, Wilson & Tucker, 2024). Leaders therefore have an important responsibility to ensure that employees receive adequate communication, technological assistance and organisational support while working across physical and virtual environments.

In Nigeria, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), digital technologies are increasingly being used for communication, marketing, customer relations, financial transactions and internal management. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are businesses that operate on a relatively

smaller scale in terms of employees, capital investment, turnover and scope of operations compared with large enterprises. They constitute an important part of Nigeria's business environment because of their contribution to employment, income generation, entrepreneurship and economic development. The growing use of digital tools provides SMEs with opportunities to adopt flexible work arrangements and maintain business activities beyond the traditional office environment. However, Nigerian SMEs operate within an environment characterised by limited financial resources, inadequate digital infrastructure, unreliable electricity supply and differences in employees' digital capabilities. Shaibu, Mbaegbu, and Nwagu (2024) emphasise the growing importance of digital skills for effective performance in contemporary Nigerian work environments, particularly in Imo State. These conditions suggest that the success of hybrid work among Nigerian SMEs depends not only on access to digital technologies but also on the ability of leaders to use these technologies effectively while providing appropriate support to employees.

Employee wellbeing has consequently become an important consideration in the management of hybrid work. Employee wellbeing refers to the extent to which employees experience positive physical, psychological, emotional and social conditions in relation to their work. In a hybrid environment, wellbeing may be influenced by the quality of communication with managers, workload, technological demands, flexibility, social interaction and the ability to maintain a healthy boundary between work and personal life. When leaders provide adequate support, clear expectations and reasonable flexibility, employees may experience greater satisfaction and balance. On the other hand, poor communication, excessive monitoring, constant online availability and inadequate technological support may increase stress and reduce employees' wellbeing. Understanding how leadership practices shape these experiences is therefore important for organisations that intend to sustain hybrid work arrangements.

Although digital transformation, hybrid work and employee wellbeing have attracted increasing scholarly attention, there is still a notable lack of empirical studies examining how digital leadership influences employee wellbeing among SMEs in Nigeria. Much of the existing literature has focused on virtual leadership, remote work and employee wellbeing in developed economies or larger organisational settings, leaving limited evidence about employees working in Nigerian SMEs. Exploring this relationship is important because the technological, infrastructural and managerial conditions of Nigerian SMEs may influence how employees experience hybrid work. Consequently, this study seeks to examine the influence of digital leadership on employee wellbeing in hybrid work models among Nigerian SMEs, with particular attention to digital communication, technological support and work-life balance.

Statement of the Problem

The adoption of digital technologies and hybrid work arrangements is creating new possibilities for Nigerian SMEs, but it is also raising concerns about employee wellbeing. Employees who work partly from home and partly in the office may experience greater flexibility, but they may also face excessive digital communication, technology-related stress, weak separation between work and personal life, and reduced interaction with colleagues. These challenges can become more serious when managers lack the skills required to lead employees effectively in a digitally connected workplace.

Although existing studies suggest that effective leadership, communication, technological support and flexibility can contribute to positive experiences in hybrid work, there is limited empirical evidence on the situation among Nigerian SMEs. Most available studies have focused on organisations and contexts outside Nigeria, leaving insufficient understanding of how digital leadership affects the wellbeing of employees in Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models. This study therefore addresses this gap by examining the influence of digital leadership on employee wellbeing and work-life balance among employees of Nigerian SMEs.

Objectives of the Study

The major aim of this study is to examine the relationship between digital leadership and employee wellbeing in hybrid work models among Nigerian SMEs. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the influence of digital communication and technological support provided by leaders on employee wellbeing among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models.
2. Determine the influence of digital leadership practices on employees' work-life balance among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do digital communication and technological support provided by leaders influence employee wellbeing among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models?
2. To what extent do digital leadership practices influence employees' work-life balance among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models?

Research Hypotheses

Ho1: Digital communication and technological support provided by leaders do not significantly influence employee wellbeing among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models.

Ho2: Digital leadership practices do not significantly influence employees' work-life balance among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

Digital Leadership

Digital leadership refers to the ability of organisational leaders to use digital technologies, tools and platforms to guide employees, coordinate activities, communicate effectively and achieve organisational goals. It involves more than technical knowledge because leaders must also demonstrate adaptability, trust, collaboration, effective communication and the ability to support employees in technology-driven work environments. Cortellazzo, Bruni, and Zampieri (2019) explain that digital transformation has changed the nature of leadership by requiring leaders to combine technological competence with interpersonal and organisational capabilities. In a similar vein, Contreras, Baykal, and Abid (2020) describe digital or virtual leadership as leadership exercised through technology-mediated interactions, where trust,

communication and social connection become particularly important.

Digital leadership is especially relevant where employees work from different locations. In such situations, leaders depend on digital platforms to communicate expectations, monitor progress, provide feedback and maintain relationships with employees. Efimov et al. (2022) found that effective virtual leadership is associated with positive employee outcomes, including job satisfaction and wellbeing. More recent evidence also indicates that digital leadership can help employees deal with technology-related demands. Alkhayyal and Bajaba (2024) found that digital leadership capability can reduce the negative effects of technostress on employee wellbeing by helping to reduce work exhaustion.

For SMEs, digital leadership is particularly important because managers often have direct relationships with employees and are closely involved in daily organisational decisions. As SMEs increasingly adopt digital platforms for communication, marketing, customer service and internal coordination, their leaders need the capacity to manage employees effectively within digitally connected environments. Shaibu, Mbaegbu, and Nwagu (2024) also emphasise the growing importance of digital skills for effective performance in contemporary Nigerian work environments. Thus, digital leadership can be viewed as an important managerial capability for SMEs seeking to benefit from digital transformation while maintaining effective employee relationships.

Employee Wellbeing

Employee wellbeing refers to the overall physical, psychological, emotional and social condition of employees in relation to their work. It includes employees' job satisfaction, level of stress, relationships at work, motivation and ability to maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life. Employee wellbeing is important because employees who experience supportive and healthy working conditions are more likely to remain motivated, engaged and productive. Wijngaards et al. (2022) describe employee wellbeing as a broad concept involving different aspects of employees' experiences and functioning at work.

The increasing use of digital technologies has also created new challenges for employee wellbeing. Although digital work can provide flexibility and autonomy, employees may experience technostress, excessive workloads, constant connectivity and difficulty separating work from personal life. Wang, Ding, and Kong (2023) found that technostress can negatively affect employee wellbeing through work exhaustion. Similarly, Andrulli and Gerards (2023) observed that flexible working arrangements can influence wellbeing through factors such as work engagement, recovery and technology-related demands.

In hybrid work environments, employee wellbeing depends greatly on how work is organised and supported. Clear communication, reasonable workloads, technological support and flexibility can improve employees' experiences, whereas excessive digital demands and inadequate support may increase stress and exhaustion. Digital leadership can also help reduce the negative effects of technostress on employee wellbeing by reducing work exhaustion (Alkhayyal & Bajaba, 2024). This suggests that supportive leadership is particularly important for maintaining employee wellbeing in digitally connected workplaces. For Nigerian SMEs, employee wellbeing is especially important

because many employees may have limited access to formal organisational wellbeing programmes. Technostress is also an important concern for employees working remotely in Nigeria, particularly as organisations increasingly depend on digital technologies for communication and work coordination (Adepoju & Taiwo, 2024). Therefore, Nigerian SMEs need to pay attention to employee wellbeing by providing supportive leadership, effective digital communication, manageable workloads and appropriate technological resources.

Hybrid Work Models

Hybrid work models refer to work arrangements in which employees combine working from the organisation's physical workplace with working remotely, usually from home or another location. Unlike fully remote work, hybrid work maintains some degree of physical interaction while providing employees with the flexibility associated with remote work. The arrangement has become increasingly common as organisations seek to balance operational requirements with employees' demand for flexibility and autonomy. Hybrid work can take different forms, including **fixed hybrid models**, where employees work remotely on predetermined days; **flexible hybrid models**, where employees have greater choice over when to work remotely; and **office-led hybrid models**, where employees are expected to spend most of their working time at the workplace but are permitted some remote work.

Hybrid work can provide several benefits, including reduced commuting time, greater autonomy, flexibility and improved opportunities for managing work and personal responsibilities. However, these benefits are not automatic. Employees may also experience difficulties such as isolation, communication problems, technology-related stress and blurred boundaries between work and personal life. Wang, Liu, Qian, and Parker (2021) emphasise that effective remote work depends on factors such as job autonomy, social support, work design and appropriate communication. Similarly, Allen, Golden, and Shockley (2015) note that the effectiveness of flexible work arrangements depends on how they are structured and managed. More recent evidence also suggests that hybrid work can have both positive and negative implications for employee wellbeing, depending on the conditions under which it is implemented (Dale, Wilson, & Tucker, 2024).

For Nigerian SMEs, hybrid work presents both opportunities and challenges. It can allow SMEs to maintain operations, reduce some workplace costs and provide employees with greater flexibility. However, limitations in digital infrastructure, electricity supply, internet access and digital skills may affect the effectiveness of hybrid arrangements. Consequently, the success of hybrid work in Nigerian SMEs depends not only on the availability of digital technologies but also on effective leadership, appropriate organisational support and attention to employee wellbeing (Shaibu, Mbaegbu, & Nwagu, 2024).

Digital Leadership and Employee Wellbeing in Hybrid Work Models

Digital leadership has become increasingly important in hybrid work environments because leaders must coordinate employees who may not always be physically present in the same workplace. Effective digital leaders use digital platforms to communicate expectations, provide feedback, monitor progress and maintain relationships with employees. They also need to create trust and ensure that employees working remotely do not feel isolated from

the organisation. Digital leadership therefore involves both technological competence and the ability to maintain effective human relationships in digitally mediated workplaces (Cortellazzo, Bruni, & Zampieri, 2019; Contreras, Baykal, & Abid, 2020).

Employee wellbeing in hybrid work is influenced by both the benefits and pressures associated with flexible working. While employees may enjoy greater autonomy and flexibility, they may also experience excessive digital communication, work overload, social isolation and difficulty separating work from personal life. Effective leadership can help reduce these pressures by providing appropriate technological support, reasonable expectations and effective communication. Alkhayyal and Bajaba (2024) found that digital leadership capability can reduce the negative effect of technostress on employee wellbeing by reducing work exhaustion. Similarly, hybrid work research suggests that employee wellbeing depends greatly on how flexible work arrangements are organised and supported (Dale, Wilson, & Tucker, 2024).

The relationship between digital leadership and employee wellbeing is therefore important because the same technology that makes hybrid work possible can also create additional demands for employees. Leaders who provide clear communication, encourage reasonable flexibility and pay attention to employees' wellbeing can help employees adjust more effectively to hybrid work. In contrast, excessive monitoring, constant connectivity and poor communication may increase stress and reduce employees' positive experiences at work (Efimov et al., 2022).

Digital Leadership and Hybrid Work in Nigerian SMEs

Digital leadership and hybrid work are particularly relevant to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria. SMEs play an important role in employment generation, self-reliance, poverty reduction and national development. Shaibu and Mbaegbu (2022) describe SMEs as an important foundation for economic development in Nigeria because of their contribution to employment creation and sustainable national development. As Nigerian SMEs increasingly adopt digital technologies, their leaders need to develop the capacity to manage employees and organisational activities within changing digital environments.

The growing use of digital technologies has created opportunities for Nigerian SMEs to communicate with employees, reach customers and coordinate business activities more efficiently. For instance, Shaibu, Mbaegbu, and Victory (2024) found that social media technologies influence the marketing operations of retail firms in Imo State, demonstrating the increasing role of digital technologies in business activities. This growing dependence on digital platforms also creates a need for leaders who can use technology effectively while maintaining good relationships with employees. However, hybrid work may be difficult for some Nigerian SMEs because of inadequate digital infrastructure, unstable electricity supply, limited financial resources and differences in employees' digital skills. Shaibu, Mbaegbu, and Nwagu (2024) emphasise the importance of relevant digital skills for effective performance in contemporary Nigerian work environments. Consequently, digital leadership can help Nigerian SMEs manage hybrid work more effectively by ensuring that employees receive appropriate technological support, clear communication and reasonable work expectations

Theoretical Review

The study is anchored on Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory and Social Exchange Theory (SET).

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory was developed by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001) to explain how different aspects of the work environment influence employee wellbeing and performance. The theory groups workplace factors into two broad categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands include aspects of work that require sustained physical or psychological effort, such as heavy workload, work pressure, time demands and emotional demands, while job resources include factors that help employees perform their duties, achieve work goals and reduce the negative effects of job demands. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) further explain that excessive job demands can lead to exhaustion and burnout, whereas adequate job resources can promote employee motivation, engagement and wellbeing.

The theory is particularly relevant to the present study because hybrid work can create both job demands and job resources. Digital communication, constant connectivity, technology-related pressure and difficulty separating work from personal life may increase job demands, while flexible working arrangements, technological support, autonomy and effective leadership can serve as job resources. Digital leadership can therefore help employees manage the demands of hybrid work by providing clear communication, technological assistance and organisational support. The JD-R Theory provides a useful basis for explaining how digital leadership may influence employee wellbeing among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory, developed by Homans (1958) and further developed by Blau (1964), explains social relationships as processes of exchange in which individuals respond to the benefits and support they receive from others. In organisational settings, the theory suggests that employees are more likely to develop positive attitudes and behaviours when they perceive that their leaders and organisations value their contributions and care about their wellbeing. When employees receive support, trust, recognition and fair treatment from their leaders, they are more likely to respond with commitment, positive work attitudes and stronger engagement.

The theory is relevant to the present study because digital leadership in hybrid work requires leaders to maintain supportive relationships with employees even when physical interaction is limited. Leaders who provide technological support, communicate regularly, show concern for employees' wellbeing and allow reasonable flexibility may create a positive exchange relationship with employees. In return, employees may experience greater job satisfaction, commitment and wellbeing. Social Exchange Theory therefore provides a useful explanation of how supportive digital leadership can influence employee wellbeing and work-life balance among employees of Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models.

Empirical Review

Junça-Silva and Lopes (2025) examined the relationship between hybrid work and employee wellbeing through the lens of work-family conflict among 376 hybrid workers. The findings showed

that employees working under hybrid arrangements experienced lower work-family conflict, which subsequently contributed to better harmony and mental health. The study concluded that hybrid work can support employee wellbeing when it enables employees to manage work and family responsibilities effectively.

Alkhayyal and Bajaba (2024) investigated the role of digital leadership in reducing the negative effects of technostress on employee wellbeing among 300 virtual employees. Using multi-wave survey data, the researchers found that technostress negatively affected employee wellbeing, while digital leadership capability helped to reduce work exhaustion and protect employees' wellbeing. The study concluded that effective digital leadership can serve as an important resource for employees facing the demands of virtual work.

Dale, Wilson, and Tucker (2024) investigated employees' experiences of wellbeing in hybrid work arrangements using data from 412 hybrid workers. The findings showed that hybrid work can provide benefits such as improved work-life balance and reduced stress, but can also create challenges including isolation, difficulty switching off from work and physical health concerns. The study concluded that hybrid work can function either as a job resource or a job demand depending on how it is organised and supported.

Alkhayyal and Bajaba (2023) examined the impact of e-leadership competencies on workplace wellbeing and job performance among 269 teleworkers worldwide. Using partial least squares path modelling, the study found that e-leadership competencies improved workplace wellbeing indirectly through e-work self-efficacy. The study concluded that leaders with appropriate competencies can create better conditions for employees working in technology-mediated environments.

Siddika (2023) examined hybrid working, wellbeing and gender among employees in a public sector organisation. The qualitative findings showed that poor internet connectivity, increased workloads, longer working hours, limited interaction with colleagues and inadequate social support could negatively affect employee wellbeing. However, hybrid work also provided opportunities for employees to balance work and family responsibilities. The study therefore concluded that the wellbeing outcomes of hybrid work depend largely on the conditions under which the arrangement is implemented.

Methods

The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design to examine the extent to which digital leadership influences employee wellbeing in hybrid work models among Nigerian SMEs. The target population comprised employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that use digital technologies and operate flexible or hybrid work arrangements. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select employees who had experience working partly from the organisation's physical workplace and partly from a remote location. A total of 230 respondents were selected from SMEs operating in Nigeria. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Digital Leadership and Employee Wellbeing in Hybrid Work Questionnaire (DLEWHWQ). The instrument employed a modified four-point Likert scale of Very High Extent (VHE) = 4, High Extent (HE) = 3, Low Extent (LE) = 2, and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1. The questionnaire was validated by two experts in management and

organisational behaviour to ensure content validity, while its reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.89, indicating high internal consistency. Out of the 230 questionnaires administered, 215 (93.5%) were successfully retrieved and used for analysis. Data were analysed using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (r) to test the hypotheses in a bivariate format, with the aid of SPSS Version 23, at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Ho1: Digital communication and technological support provided by leaders do not significantly influence employee wellbeing among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models.

Table 1: Correlation between Digital Communication and Technological Support and Employee Wellbeing.

Variables	N	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Digital Communication and Technological Support	215	1.000	–
Employee Wellbeing	215	0.684**	0.000

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researchers' Data, 2026.

Table 1 shows a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.684 with a significance value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Ho1) is rejected. This indicates that digital communication and technological support provided by leaders significantly influence employee wellbeing among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models. The positive correlation further suggests that better digital communication and technological support are associated with improved employee wellbeing.

Ho2: Digital leadership practices do not significantly influence employees' work-life balance among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models.

Table 2: Correlation between Digital Leadership Practices and Work-Life Balance

Variables	N	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Digital Leadership Practices	215	1.000	–
Work-Life Balance	215	0.721**	0.000

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researchers' Data, 2026.

Table 2 shows a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.721 with a significance value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Ho2) is rejected. This indicates that digital leadership practices significantly influence employees' work-life balance among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models. The positive correlation suggests that

effective digital leadership practices are associated with better work-life balance among employees.

Discussion

The first finding showed that digital communication and technological support significantly influence employee wellbeing among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models. This finding indicates that employees are more likely to experience positive wellbeing when leaders communicate clearly through digital platforms and provide the technological resources required to perform their duties effectively. The finding agrees with Alkhayyal and Bajaba (2023), who found that e-leadership competencies positively influence workplace wellbeing through e-work self-efficacy. It is also consistent with Alkhayyal and Bajaba (2024), who reported that digital leadership can reduce the negative effects of technostress and work exhaustion among virtual employees. Similarly, Efimov et al. (2022) observed that effective virtual leadership is associated with better employee wellbeing and job satisfaction. The finding therefore suggests that digital communication and technological support are important resources for protecting employee wellbeing when work is performed across physical and virtual environments.

The second finding revealed that digital leadership practices significantly influence employees' work-life balance among Nigerian SMEs operating hybrid work models. This suggests that leaders who provide flexibility, maintain effective communication and avoid excessive digital demands can help employees manage the relationship between work and personal responsibilities more effectively. The finding is supported by Wang et al. (2021), who identified autonomy, social support, work design and effective communication as important factors in successful remote working. It also agrees with Junça Silva and Lopes (2025), who found that hybrid work can reduce work-family conflict and contribute to better employee wellbeing. Dale et al. (2024) similarly reported that hybrid work can improve work-life balance and wellbeing when it is properly organised and supported. The finding further reinforces the importance of leadership in ensuring that the flexibility associated with hybrid work does not become a source of excessive workload or constant connectivity.

Conclusion

The study concludes that digital leadership plays an important role in promoting employee wellbeing in hybrid work models among Nigerian SMEs. Effective digital communication and technological support are associated with better employee wellbeing, while appropriate digital leadership practices contribute positively to employees' work-life balance. The findings suggest that the success of hybrid work in Nigerian SMEs depends not only on the availability of digital technologies but also on how leaders use these technologies to communicate, support employees and manage work demands. Digital leadership should therefore be regarded as an important managerial capability for sustaining healthy and productive hybrid workplaces.

Recommendations

Drawing from the results and conclusions, the researchers offer the following recommendations:

1. Managers of Nigerian SMEs should strengthen digital communication and technological support by providing

employees with reliable digital tools, clear communication channels and timely technical assistance. This will help reduce technology-related stress and improve employee wellbeing in hybrid work environments.

2. Nigerian SMEs should adopt supportive digital leadership practices that promote reasonable workloads, flexibility and clear boundaries between work and personal time. Managers should avoid unnecessary after-hours communication and excessive digital monitoring while allowing employees sufficient autonomy to manage their work responsibilities.

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