SUCCESSFULLY DESIGNING REMOTE LEADERSHIP

THE GLOBALIZATION OF LABOR DEMANDS NEW FORMS OF LEADERSHIP

Working and collaborating across distances – long and short – has already become normal in many companies, made possible through new technologies and digitalization, and made necessary by globalization and flexibilization. Companies dispersed across domestic and international branches, and personnel who telecommute from their home offices, mean an increasing number of employees no longer work in direct contact with their supervisors. Many work teams now only exist virtually. It is no longer possible for team leaders to simply walk by an employee's desk to offer a pat on the back or to ask personally for a quick favor. Instead, leadership is taking place remotely, and this presents specific challenges and for management and employees alike.

LEUPHANA STUDY: 3D LEADERSHIP
LEADERSHIP, DISTANCE, DIGITALIZA-TION, AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

The Institute of Performance Management at the Leuphana University Lüneburg is currently conducting an EU-funded study of "Remote Leadership", including surveys with experts from renowned companies all across Germany. Remote Leadership is a very complex phenomenon and presents new and specific challenges, from the demand for special communication techniques when using new media, to the need to deal with reduced communication opportunities, and to bridge cultural differences. Managers must find new paths for cooperation and communication in order to build trust from afar, motivate employees, and ensure performance. The goal of the study is to develop solutions that meet these core challenges.

The following presents the initial results from the study.

INITIAL RESULTS
EXPERT'S OPINIONS ON THE CHALLENGES FACING REMOTE LEADERSHIP

Communicating clearly

"Despite new media, remote leadership lacks the non-verbal nuances. Therefore, misinterpretations are more common. This is then amplified by linguistic and cultural barriers."

Building trust

"As a manager I must be very ready to trust my employees and give them space. But assessing employees remotely takes longer."

Developing common goals

"I have experienced that it is more difficult to develop and achieve common goals with employees through remote leadership."

Recognizing mistakes early

"It has often happened to me that I have been told of mistakes much too late. My employees think they can solve every problem locally by themselves, and only come to me once it's too late."

Giving quick feedback

"After a conference call I can't just go over to my employee and pat him on the back."

Generating commitment among the employees

"Often, agreed upon tasks are simply not worked on. Because I don't personally see my employees, goals can often be forgotten about. It is just more difficult to create commitment remotely."
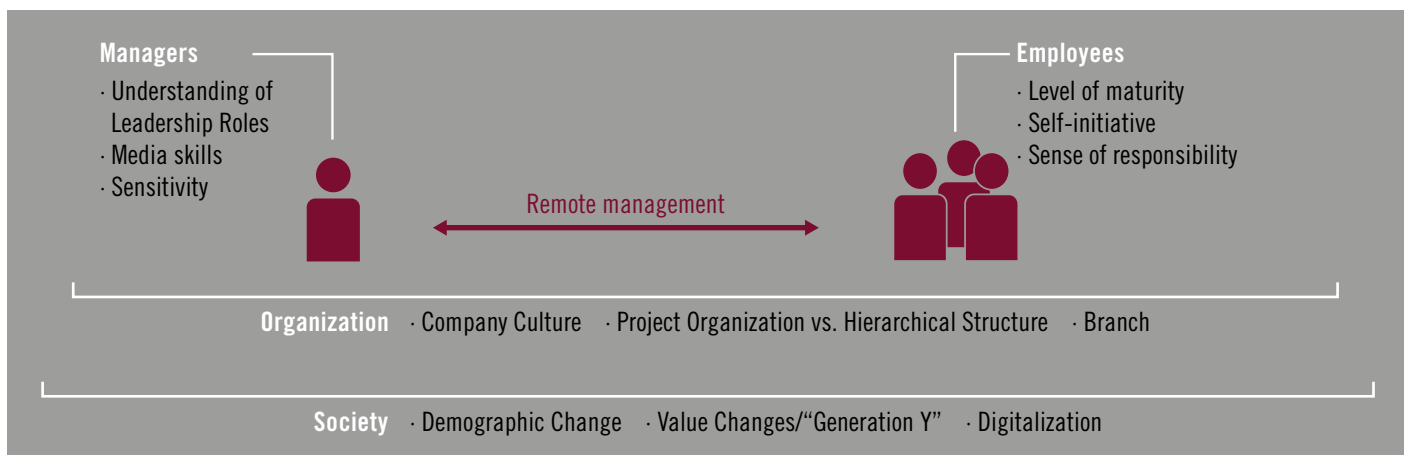
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SUCCESS FACTORS FOR REMOTE MANAGEMENT

The initial evaluations show that the configuration of remote management depends, on the one hand, on the characteristics of the managers and employees, and on the other hand, on the company culture and societal developments.

Managers
· Understanding of
  Leadership Roles
· Media skills
· Sensitivity

Remote management

Employees
· Level of maturity
· Self-initiative
· Sense of responsibility

Organization · Company Culture   · Project Organization vs. Hierarchical Structure   · Branch

Society · Demographic Change   · Value Changes/"Generation Y"   · Digitalization

Our analyses verify that the success of remote management depends to a large extent on trustful relationships between managers and employees, along with the effective provision to employees of relevant information and a clear orientation.

AT THE RELATIONSHIP LEVEL

Build up mutual trust
- Enable consistent face-to-face meetings
- Visit employees at their locations and participate in activities outside of work
- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the employees and maintain their free space

Recognize even weak signals about the quality of the relationship
- Observe employees' behavior changes (e.g., decrease in intensity of communication)
- Pay attention to relationship signals (nuances, etc.), especially while communicating remotely (phone, e-mail, chat)
- Receive consistent feedback and ask employees about their well-being in the workplace

Communicate self-consciously and sensibly
- Check e-mails for ambiguous statements and trigger words before sending
- Regularly check the effectiveness of your communication
- Always ask if there are any questions in order to avoid misunderstandings

AT THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION LEVEL

Ensure a structured exchange of information
- Create fixed and binding communication times
- Enable efficient and goal-oriented meetings through structural elements such as agendas, moderation, preparation, and follow-ups
- Thoroughly document results of meetings

Ensure successful communication
- Check back to ensure knowledge brokering and encourage employees to ask questions
- Summarize important results and agreed upon duties and goals (e.g., resolutions, sending protocols by e-mail)
- Incorporate employees at remote locations into the communication

Use the appropriate media appropriately
- Be sensible to the appropriateness of different forms of communication (e.g., forward information by e-mail, but resolve conflicts in person)
- Build preparation time and trial periods into plans
- Favor face-to-face communication for conflicts and personal topics