

Finnish Remote Leadership in Home Care during the Pandemic

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This study was conducted as part of the national The More Remotely – work in social and health care is changing project (2019-2022). The purpose of this qualitative study was to clarify how functional remote leadership works from the perspective of superiors and to gain new information on the functionality and development needs of remote leadership. The data consisted of the material collected via a group-based themed interview, memoranda written by members of the training groups and assignments submitted by the participants. The data were analyzed through material-driven content analysis. The results show that remote leadership is based on the same principles as good leadership in general: communality, trust, interaction and clear ground rules. When these sections are in order, remote leadership works. Positive sides of remote leadership that emerged include faster, real-time sharing of information and the decoupling of work from a specific place. Work was seen as more efficient and productive. The greatest challenges to remote leadership are problems related to technology, such as failing programs and devices, constant changes and a lack of guidance. Remote leadership was seen as increasing anonymity and distance within the workplace. Superiors felt that physical meetings were needed to support remote leadership. Central development proposals included familiarizing people with the culture of remote leadership and increasing knowledge and use of various programs and devices. There is also a need to clarify the ground rules, scheduling and practices of remote conferences and to constantly gather feedback on the functionality of remote leadership. Teaching about remote leadership as part of basic studies in the social and health care field would prepare future professionals to being led remotely.

Keywords: remote leadership, home care, technology, remote meetings, Finland

Introduction

Remote leadership has been studied internationally for some decades in the context of global organizations, e-projects and virtual teams, but the COVID-19 pandemic turned it into a major global leadership challenge in a matter of months, and Finland was no exception. There is likely no return to the so called previous normal, which is why organizations should use all the digital tools they acquired during the pandemic as part of their leadership going forward.

Remote leadership means using technological tools to conduct leadership-related communication and interaction, as physical, face-to-face meetings are rare.

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The purest cases of remote leadership involve situations where the superior does not work at the same location as their subordinates and does not meet them daily or even weekly. The portion of their leadership work superiors perform remotely can vary widely, e.g., 20%-80%. Full 100% remote leadership likely only happens at large national or global organizations. Typical remote leadership at Finnish health and social care organizations involves both remote and in-person interaction.

Superiors require training and support when switching to remote leadership, as a few hours' worth of teaching is not enough to make someone a remote leader. Too often superiors are expected to master new technologies and applications simply through reading written instructions with no practical exercises (Turesky et al. 2020, Sharpp et al. 2019). Remote leadership also requires rethinking communication and informing, as close contacts and unofficial hallway talks are either few or non-existent.

Remote leadership requires technological skills, as most meetings and discussions occur virtually. However, the principles of good leadership apply to remote leadership as well: building and maintaining relationships, good communication and notifying and enabling the personnel's productivity (Gerke 2006). The literature review section of this article discusses the qualities of a good remote leader and how the aforementioned principles apply to remote leadership. The empiric research portion analyzes the Finnish social and health care system and their application of remote leadership during the pandemic.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is responsible for general planning, directing, and preparing legislation related to home care and home services. The purpose of home care and home services is to offer support services to people, often elderly or disabled, living at home. Aside from supervisors, most of the employees at home care are home care assistants, home helpers or practical nurses. The supervisor of a home care manager is a nurse manager of primary health care. Remote leadership has been common in Finnish home care for decades, as nurses work at their clients' homes and do not meet their supervisors daily or even weekly. Home care is organized as teamwork, and teams often have break rooms located in a separate location from their supervisor's place of work.

Literature Review

Communication Skills

The most successful remote leaders are energetic people who have a need to achieve results, a desire for responsibility and a willingness to constantly learn new things. They are also flexible, analytical and have good technical skills. Implementing new technological solutions requires remote leaders who are capable of testing programs and developing their use (Liu et al. 2018), which requires a logical mind and an ability to plan, organize and delegate. To communicate effectively the remote leader must give constant feedback and clear assignments and instructions. They build reliability within the workplace and are themselves reliable (Maduka et al. 2017).

Determination, self-confidence and linguistic versatility are also qualities that often emerge in studies of successful remote leaders. They are adaptive, inspiring, clear communicators and capable of using multiple communications media fluently. They can lessen the stress and fatigue of their subordinates through participative leadership instead of authoritarian management (Hahm 2017). Inspiring leaders seek to cooperate with their subordinates and care about their welfare and job satisfaction (Furumo 2018).

Flavian et al. (2019) discuss an ideal remote leader, who is magnetic, good-looking, elegant, stylish and even sexy. They are also empathetic and willing to encourage their team to express their feelings. A benevolent supervisor is capable of relating to their subordinates in a friendly, respectful and dignified way in decision-making situations. A just supervisor treats their subordinates in a consistent fashion, considering their opinions and views, explaining the decision-making process and by holding enough feedback discussions. Alluring and interesting leaders inspire the most trust, which is why leaders should invest in visual signals such as high-quality profile pictures on electronic media (Flavian et al. 2019). Remote leaders should thus appear presentable in video conferences and include a good picture of themselves with all messages. It is also advisable to occasionally change profile pictures rather than using the same years-old picture.

The abovementioned qualities of good remote leaders would be useful for anyone in a leadership role, but their importance is heightened in remote leadership, as the distance and virtual nature of communication place different demands from in-person leadership. According to the literature, the ideal remote leader is a highly methodical, logical, goal-oriented and extroverted individual, who communicates in a clear and versatile way and is benevolent and attractive in a variety of ways.

Building Trust

The literature emphasizes building trust as a basis for remote leadership. It can be seen as a workplace skill and resource that allows the supervisor to influence their subordinates. Trust is a critical factor in binding a team together and of utmost importance to efficient teamwork (Cowan 2014, Savolainen 2016). Supervisors can affect the building of trust by showing their reliability through their skill, honesty, benevolence and constancy (Savolainen and Häkkinen 2011). Building a relationship with a subordinate remotely is more challenging, as meetings tend to be brief and more prone to misunderstandings. Remote leaders should communicate frequently with their subordinates to help build a relationship. As often as possible, they should also hold in-person meetings with all team members where they can share experiences and build a common understanding (Flavian et al. 2019).

Building and managing relationships through remote leadership requires social skills, such as open communication and listening, and technical skills, such as the use of information and communication technology. Reliability and an ability to show openness and honesty are also important. Aside from technical skills, remote leaders require communication and notifying skills, compassion, empathy and an understanding of human behavior (Hebert 2020).

A relationship mediated through technology requires time for building trust. Intermittent and brief contacts are not enough, as they are not necessarily enough to form a complete picture of the subordinate's situation. Without such a picture, the supervisor's assistance often remains superficial. The supervisor should thus reserve enough time to familiarize themselves with each subordinate's work and work situations, which would also encourage the subordinate to communicate openly. It is difficult to transmit, receive and process emotions in digital environments. Occasional in-person meetings strengthen the supervisor-subordinate relationship more efficiently than online interactions. Supervisors also need support, understanding of remote leadership and sufficient equipment and space from their own organization (Savolainen 2016).

Building trust thus requires official meetings in which participants talk, build interpersonal relationships, share things and opinions and learn to know one another better and on a deeper level. Aside from official meetings, unofficial meetings, in which the parties discuss personal matters and their leisure time, are also necessary (Savolainen 2016). Video meetings can be turned into unofficial meetings by having people stay online to talk after the official portion. Supervisors can also encourage their subordinates to have unofficial virtual meetings (e.g., virtual happy hours). Meetings such as these can enhance team members' sense of belonging to the team and the organization (Reyes et al. 2020, Kelley and Kelloway 2012).

To build trust, supervisors should be seen as just by all their subordinates. They should also apply the same rules to all, act consistently, consider the opinions of their subordinates, make decision-making processes transparent and maintain a good culture of feedback (Flavian et al. 2019). Maintaining contact with each team member is also important to meet their personal needs and to increase their psychological sense of safety (Reyes et al. 2020).

The sense of trust experienced by members of a work team has a significant connection to the team's job satisfaction and sense of community. Trust also increases the commitment to the team and work and improves information sharing within the team and learning as a team. Trust within a team has been found to increase team members' ability to take risks, group coordination, ability to work together and a positive view of the team's ability to perform (Newman et al. 2020, Breuer et al. 2016).

The remote leader's ability to express feelings, empathy, understanding and benevolence to subordinates is crucial to building and maintaining a confident relationship. Even though in-person meetings are fewer in remote leadership, the remote leader can still use digital media empathetically by showing interest in the subordinate's work and potential problems (Flavian et al. 2019).

Remote workers can feel isolated in their own homes. Experiences of distance and psychological isolation can nonetheless be eased through remote techniques that offer quality interactions comparable to in-person meetings (Wang et al. 2020). Subordinates who work remotely and physically separate from others are in particular need of support and attention from their supervisor. Sufficient support given by the supervisor increases the subordinate's sense of safety, professional capability and personal welfare and improves their work retention (Onnis 2015).

The supervisor controls and assigns resources and interacts with their subordinates regularly. They also encourage team members to support each other and solve conflicts. The remote leader also consciously helps create an identity and culture for the team (Stratone and Vătămănescu 2019), which will take shape in time as the team creates its own ground rules and procedures.

Platform and Interaction

Remote leaders are expected to communicate flexibly and to set clear goals to create a productive and positive work environment. Constant messaging and cooperation between leaders and staff is important. Remote leaders are also expected to pre-emptively communicate with different groups to avert potential problems and to encourage the use of alternative methods (Hebert 2020).

Remote leaders are responsible for setting the rules of communication and the use of communication media. As a flood of information may overwhelm personnel, it is the duty of supervisors to filter the flood of information and forward only relevant knowledge. The timely use of e-tools to give feedback and thanks and to solve problems, including performance issues, is important. Distance should never be a hindrance to problem-solving, as e-communication media can be used swiftly and effectively (Cowan 2014). Almost a decade ago, Purvanova (2014) wrote that in the future people will come to see virtual messaging and interaction as equal to physical, face-to-face communication. However, virtual communication often involves technical challenges and failures, which is frustrating (Purvanova 2014). Every organization thus needs technical support that is swiftly available to all. The personnel must also be provided with training on the use of devices and applications (Liu et al. 2018).

Remote leaders should ideally contact their team daily to apprise them of the team's goals, priorities and progress, including that of other members (Reyes et al. 2020). Regular messaging allows the team to stay informed of daily matters and strengthens interpersonal relationships and team spirit. Remote leaders require the ability to create a positive work environment, improve notification and cooperation and to manage change through various virtual information and communication technologies (Roman et al. 2018).

Interaction and notification in remote leadership can be improved by using technology best suited to the situation, expressing things clearly, being in active contact with one's subordinates and supporting them, reacting swiftly to things and being open and inclusive. Often supervisors only use technologies familiar and comfortable to them without considering whether another technology would be more suitable to the task. E-mail, chat and notice boards are suitable for delivering one-way routine information, but delicate or disciplinary matters or complex tasks and problems are better conducted through video conferences. Matters such as meeting times, training schedules, system problems or procedure changes are well-suited for e-mail. The ability to express matters clearly is also highly significant in virtual environments. Supervisors often believe they have expressed themselves clearly while their readers disagree (Hill and Bartol 2018).

Multichannel messaging includes many options for one-way and two-way communication, even though most in-person leaders only use phone calls, e-mail and text messages (Erjavec et al. 2018). Remote leaders should use all possible channels and consider which of them are best suited for their tasks.

Video conferences have become very familiar in the social and health care sector during the pandemic. It would be a good idea to activate participants with suitable tools such as e-polls (e.g., Forms, Polls, Kahoot) a whiteboard (e.g., Whiteboard, Answergarden) and other platforms that allow participants to write and draw (e.g., Flinga, Padlet). At their best video conferences are a rich and interactive experience, in which participants communicate with their voice, expressions, gestures and other materials. Remote leadership and remote work have increased the use of emoji in written texts. They can be used to advance an unofficial and collegial mood and help create a sense of cooperation between team members (Darics 2020, pp. 3–29).

Remote leadership requires innovative solutions on how to build closeness and trust remotely. A good example of this is Turesky et al.'s (2020) study, in which a supervisor created various topical videos in which they also shared details about their hobbies and interests. The videos became so popular that their subordinates wanted a new one every week.

Supporting Teams

Enabling the productivity and performance of workplaces and teams requires setting realistic goals and measuring achieved results (Cowan 2014). It is important for subordinates to receive feedback on their progress, such as a weekly e-mail from a supervisor summarizing the team's goals and progress (Reyes et al. 2020). Supervisors should also encourage and reward their team for results and good practices. Transparency is vital in leadership, as it increases trust. An atmosphere of high trust is the basis for the entire workplace's productivity and performance (Turesky et al. 2020).

When working remotely, trust is a critical factor in enabling productivity. Team members should signal their reliability by e.g., explaining how they handle various situations or by replying quickly to messages. It is also important for team members to give each other feedback, share their thoughts on the team's potential challenges pre-emptively and to maintain a positive and solid attitude towards work. The supervisor can support the team by communicating transparently and inclusively and by including the entire team in important communications and decision-making. It is important to actively ask the team to suggest different perspectives, ideas and approaches so that the team may find the best solutions to different situations (Hill and Bartol 2018).

Supervising work remotely requires good communication. The line between work and leisure time can become blurred to both the supervisor and the subordinate, which may cause a temptation to work overtime to move forward faster. This is particularly likely for highly motivated individuals. Social connections may also become limited to just one's family and local friends. Remote work can encourage a workplace culture where work e-mails are sent late

and one is always working and sitting. This challenges supervisors to observe both their own and their subordinates' welfare at work (Grant et al. 2013).

Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted as part of the EU-funded national *The More Remotely – work in social and health care is changing* project (2019-2022). The project seeks to respond to the transformation of the Finnish social and health care sector by developing remotely conducted leadership, work guidance and peer support, by improving change leadership and by strengthening personnel's skills in these areas. The project is coordinated by the Tampere University of Applied Sciences with the participation of the Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, the University of Lapland and the University of Eastern Finland.

In Finland, the responsibility for the general planning, directing and drafting of relevant laws of home care and home services lies with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The services provided by home service and home nursing are intended to support its clients' ability to live at home. Home service is based on the Social Welfare Act, while home nursing is based on the Health Care Act. Municipalities can combine the two as home care (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health n.d.). Home service includes various tasks and activities (or assistance with them) related to habitation, care and maintaining the client's ability to function (Social Welfare Act 1301/2014). Home nursing is arranged based on the patient's care and service plan or temporarily at the patient's residence, home or comparable location. Home nursing is a multiprofessional health and nursing service (Health Care Act 1326/2010).

This article presents research findings on the realization of remote leadership in home care in the Pirkanmaa region in Western Finland. The purpose of the study was to chart remote leadership's positive effects, functioning practices and challenges. The goal of the study was to gain new information on the functioning and development needs of remote leadership during the pandemic, which can be utilized in the project and its target organizations, leadership in the social and health care field and leadership training. This article answers the question: "How is remote leadership realized in the home care of the Pirkanmaa region?"

Data Collection and Analysis

As part of the *More Remotely – work in social and health care is changing* project, a year-long training program was organized for supervisors (N=60) working in home care that included both in-person and remote meetings. The supervisors were also given training through remote job guidance and peer support. Nine (n=9) of the supervisors who participated in the training also participated in a remote group interview that was conducted via the Teams video platform in Autumn 2020. At the time of the interview the supervisors had

approximately eight months of experience of leadership during a pandemic. A second set of data used in this study consisted of assignments submitted by the supervisors (n=60) as part of the training and memoranda written by the training groups (f=17).

At the beginning of the project, research permissions were sought from all municipalities and organizations participating in the project. The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of supervisors' personal experiences in their own reality and the objects of the study were behavior, emotions and experiences (Holloway and Galwin 2017, p. 3). The structure and contents of the themed interview was created based on a broad literature review and the intelligibility of the questions was tested on members of the research group. No background information was gathered on the interviewees, as they had participated in the training groups. Good scientific practices and ethical principles were followed by the researchers. Prior to the interviews, each participant was sent a notice on scheduling and a link to an e-form, if the participant had signed a form in which they consented to being interviewed and having their interviews used as part of scientific research. The interviews were saved for data analysis and destroyed after the study was finished. The interviewees were informed of the voluntary nature of the interview and of their possibility to leave the interview if they so desired. Transcribed, the interview data consisted of 26 A4 pages written in the Arial font using font size 12 and 1.0 spacing.

The documentary data consisted of assignments written by the participants and 17 memoranda written by the training groups. They clearly contained sections that were based on literature rather than the supervisors' own thoughts and views. These sections were left out of the analysis. As some of the memoranda had identical or nearly identical titles, they were numbered. This can be used to show that the data has been used broadly.

The data were analyzed through data-based content analysis. The transcription was performed by writing down the interviews word-for-word without changing the replies or the expressions they used. The transcription did not mark pauses or tone of voice. After the transcription, the data were reduced by removing portions irrelevant to the study question. After reduction, the data were clustered into a new logical whole by searching for similarities in the data. After clusterization, the data were reduced again. After the data had been grouped into subcategories, each group was named with the concept that best described its contents. The subcategories were then abstracted into categories and main categories (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Table 1 contains an example of the process of content analysis.

Table 1. *An Example of Content Analysis: Challenges of Remote Leadership*

Reduced expression	Subcategory	Category	Main category	Connecting category
Clear ground rules	Clarity of ground rules	Factors that support managing diversity	Diversity in the workplace	
Regular meetings	Regularity of meetings			
E-communication media	E-communication media			
Weekly bulletin	Weekly workplace bulletin			
Cultural differences	Cultural differences	Factors that form diversity		
Knowledge	Personnel's level of know-how			Challenges of remote leadership
Skills				
Age	Different ages			
Educational background	Different educational backgrounds and professional groups			
Professional groups				
Incapacitated workers	Incapacity			
Different ways to work	Different work methods			

Results

Positive Effects of Remote Leadership

According to the supervisors (n=9), remote leadership has brought several positive things to their leadership. Work is no longer tied to a place and no time is spent on commuting. They felt that sharing information is now faster, more real-time and available to all simultaneously. They considered e-communication reliable and thought it had made communication within the workplace more seamless (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Central Positive Effects of Remote Leadership*

Central positive effects of remote leadership
Work is no longer tied to a place
No time is spent on commuting
Sharing information is faster and more real-time
Information is available to all simultaneously
E-communication is reliable
Work is more efficient, productivity has increased
Increased opportunities
Organizing meetings is easier
Saving time and expenses
Less overlapping work
Expressing one's self and opinions is easier

The supervisors reported that remote leadership had made work more efficient and productive and the use of resources more flexible and efficient. They had also found that remote leadership made it easier to utilize the strengths of their subordinates. The supervisors also believed that there were more opportunities related to topics such as participation and multi-professional cooperation. They saw video conferences as a positive, as organizing and participating in them despite distances was easier than in in-person meetings. Meetings stayed on topic better and granting the right to speak was clearer than in in-person meetings. They also reported various savings caused by remote leadership, such as with time and expenses (see Table 2).

“...the work is made easier when you don’t always have to look for parking spaces”

“...it has now been possible to get together and share things much more often than before, just so when this is so easy...Through remote connections, it can be repeated more often and more easily”

“Remote leadership is ... a model that allows for multi-professionalism ... it also enables such over-organizational co-operation”

The supervisors believed their task had become easier due to remote leadership, as it has removed overlapping work and made work more flexible. They also thought that work had become more free and easier to influence. They also considered target dates easier to meet, as there are fewer interruptions to work. Remote leadership and remote work was seen as a positive particularly for younger workers. The results also showed that supervisors believed it was easier to express oneself and one’s opinions while working remotely (see Table 2).

The Functioning of Remote Leadership

The results showed various factors that affect the success of remote leadership. One significant factor was subordinates’ individual characteristics, of which things such as age, attitude and skill level were mentioned. The respondents also believed it was important for supervisors to consider their subordinates’ individuality. The overall functioning of the workplace affects remote leadership as well. Some such factors that were mentioned include the sense of trust and familiarity at the workplace and the team’s ability to self-direct and cooperate (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Factors Affecting the Functioning of Remote Leadership*

Factors affecting the functioning of remote leadership
Subordinates’ individual characteristics (age, attitude and skill level)
Consideration of subordinates’ individuality
Functioning of cooperation at the workplace
Sense of trust at the workplace
Team’s ability to self-direct
Supervisor’s motivational skills
Supervisor’s know-how and interest
Implementing digitalization in practice

The supervisors' skills were also reported to affect the functioning of remote leadership. Supervisors should be able to motivate their subordinates and have sufficient skills and interest to use technological tools. Supervisors should also implement digitalization in practice. Supervisors also mentioned their own ability to influence their own work as a contributing factor to the success of remote leadership (see Table 3).

"...trust is an important starting point in all communication."

"...the team is self-directed..."

"...after all, it is based on knowing each other..."

"... the supervisor motivates his employees to use technology..."

"If a supervisor isn't interested in these kinds of electronic tools, then at least it won't encourage employees either."

Challenges of Remote Leadership

The results show that supervisors also faced challenges in remote leadership. According to their experiences, the challenges presented in Table 4 are lessened and prevented by a workplace that functions well. Factors that contribute to a functioning workplace include trust, a sense of community, openness, respect and communication. Superiors believed it was important for subordinates to have a clear understanding of their role at work. Common agreements, regularity and clarity in general were seen as factors that reduce challenges. Supervisors may survey emerging challenges by observing the workplace and gathering feedback.

Challenges related to technology included applications that run slowly or do not work. Other challenges include the constant need to learn more and deficiencies in training and guides. Having an inaccurate understanding of one's subordinates' level of technological skills may also cause challenges. Technology also involves security risks, which the respondents considered a challenge to remote leadership (see Table 4).

"...we have some kind of common goal that will then be achieved"

"...the staff hopes that supervisors will be well available"

"It is different when there is no physical interaction between people..."

"...if employees don't do the things they should be doing..."

Remote leadership and remote work were also seen as causing challenges to welfare at work, both to supervisors and subordinates. Medical leaves, a sense of loneliness and problems related to alcohol were believed to increase due to remote work. The supervisors thought that remote work was more challenging to older personnel. They also believed that remote leadership had increased anonymity, unavailability and distance between members of the workplace (see Table 4).

Table 4. *Central Challenges of Remote Leadership*

Central challenges of remote leadership
Committing subordinates to the organization and its work culture
Measuring work performance
Subordinates' ability to self-direct
Supervisor's unavailability
Diversity in the workplace
Following employee stress
Noticing problems in the workplace
Technology
Deficiencies in training and guides
Inaccurate understanding of subordinates' level of technological skills
Security risks
Workplace welfare
Lack of knowledge of video conference practices
Amount of work
Demand of being constantly available

The supervisors mentioned various challenges related to video conferences, even though they also saw them as a positive. Some of the challenges they identified included a failure to fully learn the importance of remote meetings or how to request permission to speak in meetings. On the other hand, requests to speak were sometimes overlooked (see Table 4).

“...after all, this can create that loneliness ... so others will suffer loneliness ... then some people are excluded themselves out of the work community and many people have had alcohol problems ...

“... for older workers, it can indeed be a great effort ... and it can lead to sick leave ... Some may be exhausted ...”

“...everything has to be learned by yourself...”

The lessening of overlapping work and the easing of the supervisor's job, which were seen as positives, were also discussed as challenges. The supervisors reported having so much work they could not clear it all, nor could they absorb all the information sent to them. They also believed that remote leadership had lessened freedom and the ability to influence things at the workplace. They had experienced an increase in their responsibilities and demands on them caused by factors such as the requirement to be constantly available. The supervisors also discussed situations where strong-willed employees had adopted roles that did not belong to them, which causes its own set of challenges to leadership (see Table 4).

Discussion

This study charted the positive effects, functioning practices and challenges of remote leadership in the home care of the Pirkanmaa region. Sixty supervisors participated in the study, of whom nine (n=9) agreed to the voluntary group interview.

This study found many advantages to remote leadership, such as savings in time and costs, swift and real-time sharing of information and improved productivity. Digital communication media can be used quickly and effectively, as has been found in other studies (Cowan 2014, Hill and Bartol 2018). The responders felt that virtual meetings were quick and fast to organize, which saved time and funds. However, Reyes et al. (2020) also found it important to organize unofficial meetings, in which people can socialize in a more relaxed atmosphere.

One surprising result was the supervisors' observation that it is easier for participants to express themselves and their opinions in virtual meetings than in in-person ones. Similar results were not found in other studies. A reason for employees' increased courage could be the ability to deactivate the camera, which allows one to speak without showing one's expressions and gestures. However, participants would ideally use cameras during video conferences, as it makes interactions more life-like. Employees' unwillingness to discuss things openly in-person may also suggest problems with the supervisor's leadership and the workplace's atmosphere and intra-personal relationships. However, the willingness to talk more during remote meetings may also reflect the employees simply missing each other.

According to the results of this study, the functioning of remote leadership is affected by employees' individuality and its recognition (e.g., age, attitude, level of technical skills), as was also discussed by Poulsen and Ipsen (2017) in their study. Supervisors' technological skills and willingness to learn more heavily affect the implementation of digitalization at the workplace, as was discovered in earlier studies (Roman et al. 2018, Cowan 2014, Maduka et al. 2018, Liu et al. 2018). The impact of cooperation and trust at the workplace on remote leadership was mentioned as a significant factor in the interviews. Earlier studies (Newman et al. 2020, Breuer et al. 2016) have found that trust increases teams' ability to perform and cooperate. Supervisors' ability to build trust and encourage and motivate their subordinates affects the functioning of remote leadership, as was also found by Turesky et al. (2020).

The interviewees mentioned several challenges of remote leadership, such as work welfare and committing employees to the organization and its work culture. Reyes et al. (2020) suggest that employees' commitment to the team and organization can be increased during remote work through unofficial meetings such as virtual happy hours. The supervisors who participated in this project did not discuss organizing unofficial communication. This may however be caused by the fact that all the supervisors regularly met with their subordinates in-person.

Onnis (2015) emphasizes how sufficient support from the supervisor to their subordinates increased work welfare and employee retention. Remote leaders also have challenges in detecting problems at the workplace-level and the amounts of employee stress. The blurring of the line between work and leisure time may tempt some to work overtime, which may become a risk to work welfare (Grant et al. 2013). Technical challenges, such as slow or non-functioning applications, were severe as workplaces switched to remote leadership due to the pandemic. Purvanova's (2014) study found similar technological challenges related to remote leadership.

Based on the results of this study, the greatest development need in remote leadership is in supporting the use of various programs and tools. Workplaces need better guidance and support should be easier to reach, as was also found by Liu et al. (2018). According to the supervisors’ experiences, various applications should be used more effectively both in leadership and in guiding employees. According to the results, ground rules related to remote leadership should be clarified more, which Cowan (2014) also found. The culture of remote leadership should be implemented better in practice. Stratone and Vätămănescu (2019) suggest that remote leaders should consciously help create an identity and culture to the workplace. As for remote conferences, the supervisors thought that meeting practices should be clarified. It would also be important to better chart the level of technological skills within the workplace.

This study was conducted at a historic time, in the middle of the pandemic, which has given valuable and concrete information about the development needs of remote leadership. In the future, remote leadership will be considered a core competency expected of supervisors (Busse and Weidner 2020). The results of this study show that practices related to remote leadership should be clarified in the home care of the Pirkanmaa region. Technological skills, functioning technology and swift access to support in various situations are important from the perspective of efficiency (see Table 5).

It would be highly important to further develop guidance related to the use of technology, as lacking technological skills are a major hindrance to successful remote leadership. Workplaces should have a skill level high enough to use various applications and tools, as it is the only way of implementing functioning remote leadership. Organizations should collect more feedback related to remote leadership and disseminate information about how remote leadership has affected things such as work welfare and the Finnish nurse shortage (see Table 5).

Table 5. Central Development Needs of Remote Leadership

Central development needs of remote leadership
Practical knowledge of various applications and tools should be increased through guidance and better access to support
The use of application should be expanded in both remote leadership and employee guidance
Ground rules related to remote leadership should be clarified
The culture of remote leadership should be implemented better in practice
There should be a clear schedule to the execution of hybrid leadership
Practices related to video conferences should be clarified
Remote leadership should be taught as part of basic studies in the social and health care field
Organizations should gather constant feedback on the functioning of remote leadership

On this basis it would be wise to consider the supervisors’ suggestion of teaching remote leadership as part of basic studies. By learning about remote leadership and further developing it, the social and health care field will remain on pace with modern trends. Remote leadership should be considered more broadly as part of social and health care studies.

Conclusion

Remote leadership has constantly developed within organizations during the pandemic. While restrictions will end and activities will become free, the practices learned during the pandemic should continue to be used and further refined.

Near-term challenges in every organization include modeling, implementing and clarifying the culture of remote leadership. This requires involving the entire personnel and thus creating common ground rules. Implementing remote leadership requires investment in technological tools, applications and training for the personnel.

It is important to conduct further research on the realization of remote leadership and the formation of its culture in the target organizations.

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