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Finnish remote leadership in home care during the pandemic

Hannele Laaksonen, PhD. Principal Lecturer
Tia Bäckström, Master of Social Services
Tampere University of Applied Sciences



Vipuvoimaa
EU:lta
2014–2020



Background

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.

In the reformed social and health sector, many leaders will work in a decentralised organisation, where the work units under a manager are located in physically different places. This emphasises the need for remote management and remote management skills. Covid-time has increased need for digitalisation in many ways.

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.

More Remotely - Work in Social and Health Care Is Changing

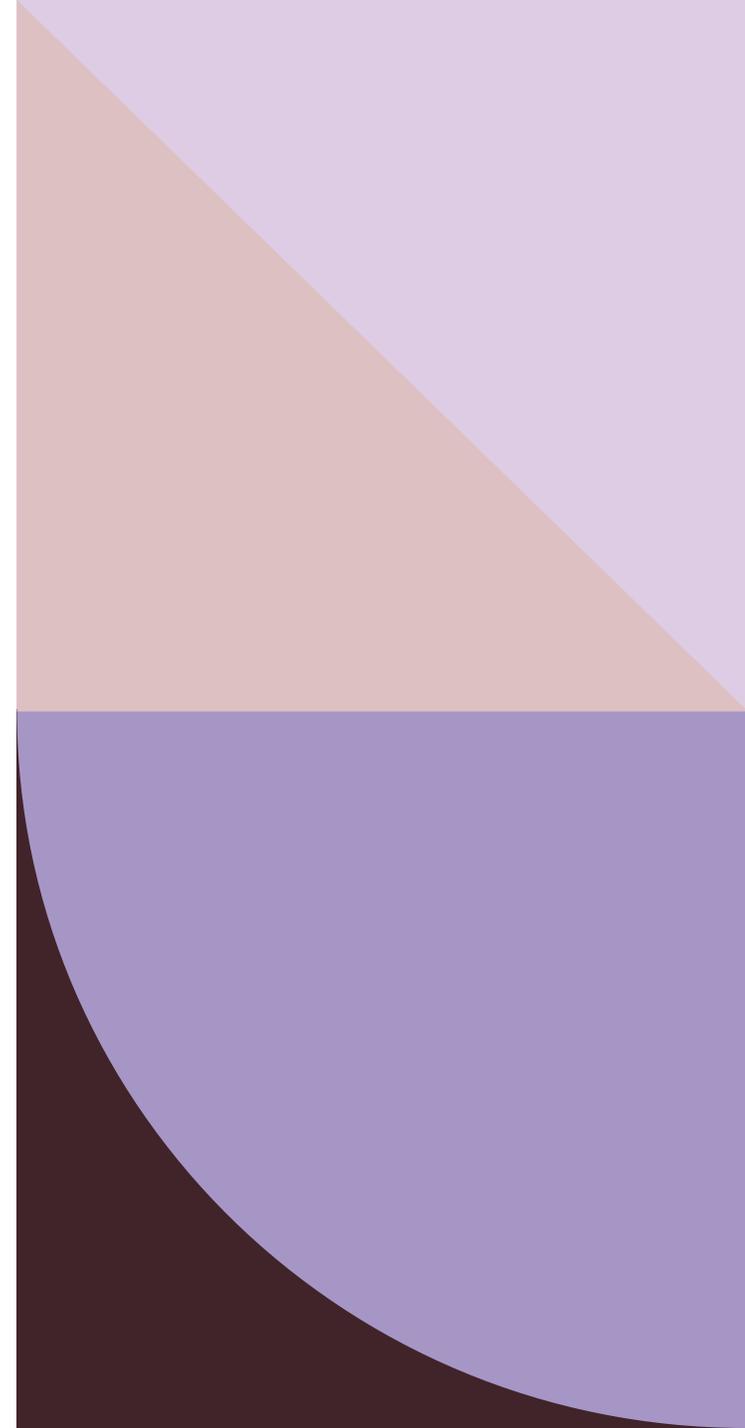
1.1.2019-31.12.2022

A national EU-funded project

The overall goal of the project is to increase work wellbeing, work management and work productivity.

In this project, we are developing

- remote leadership,
- remote work supervision,
- remote peer support



Project management and partners

The national project is administrated and coordinated by Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) and the other participants are

- the University of Eastern Finland,
- the University of Lapland
- Satakunta University of Applied Sciences
- Local government employers in Finland

The purpose, target and research questions

- 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.

Research questions:

1. How is remote leadership realized in the home care of the Pirkanmaa region?
2. How remote leadership should be developed?

Research design

- Qualitative study
- The data was collected In autumn 2020

Data collection and analysis:

The data consisted of the material collected via 1) a group-based themed interviews (n=9) using the Teams platform, 2) memoranda written by members of the training groups and assignments submitted by the participants (f=17).

The data were analyzed through material-driven content analysis.

1. How is remote leadership realized in the home care of the Pirkanmaa region?



Central positive effects of remote leadership

“...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”

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

Factors affecting the functioning of remote leadership

“...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.”

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

Central challenges of remote leadership

“...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...”

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

A group of business professionals in a meeting. A woman in a grey blazer is pointing at a tablet held by another person. A man in a dark suit is also looking at the tablet. There are coffee cups on the table. The text "2. How remote leadership should be developed?" is overlaid in white on the image.

2. How remote leadership should be developed?

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

Discussion

- 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.
- 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).
- 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.
- 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).

Conclusions

- Remote leadership has constantly developed within organizations during the pandemic.
- The practices learned during the pandemic should continue to be used and further developed.
- 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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Finnish Remote Leadership in Home Care during the Pandemic

By Hannele Laaksonen & Tia Bäckström[±]*

An aerial photograph of a multi-lane highway bridge crossing a body of turquoise water. The bridge has several vehicles, including a white truck and a blue car. A large, white, brushstroke-style graphic is overlaid on the center of the image, partially obscuring the bridge and water. The text "Thank You!" is centered within this white graphic.

Thank You!