Beat Burnout

Leading through distance

Difficulties faced by managers in a virtual work setting
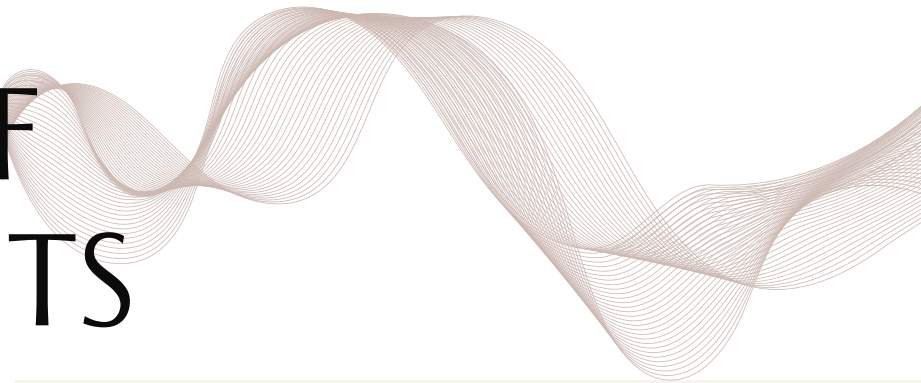
International Report

October 2023

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INTRODUCTION

This report is the second in a series of comprehensive studies across eight European countries (Sweden, Ireland, Italy, Czech Republic, Austria, Greece, Poland, and Spain) focusing on the evolving landscape of remote work. Unlike the first report, which delved into burnout among women working remotely, this phase emphasizes the perspectives of managers, leaders, and coaches. Our goal is to understand their challenges and perceptions of burnout in remote settings, thereby aiding in developing effective strategies to address these issues.

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Purpose and aims

The primary goal of this study is to delve into the nuanced challenges and perspectives of managers, leaders, and coaches in the context of remote work, with a particular focus on the issue of burnout. Following our initial research on burnout among women working remotely, this phase aims to broaden the understanding of how remote work impacts those in managerial roles. Key aims include:

01 Understanding the unique challenges faced by managers in remote work settings.

02 Gaining insights into managers' perceptions and experiences of burnout.

03 Identifying effective strategies and practices that managers use to mitigate burnout and promote well-being in remote teams.

04 Contributing to developing comprehensive tools and guidelines to support healthy remote work cultures.

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Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, providing a robust analysis of the remote work environment from a managerial perspective. The methodology included:

SURVEYS

Distributed online, Over 90 surveys captured quantitative data on various aspects of remote work, including work habits, burnout experiences, and managerial strategies.

Conducted with over 81 managers, leaders, and coaches, the interviews offered in-depth qualitative insights into personal experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in remote work settings.
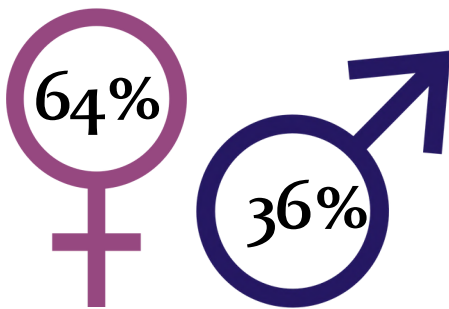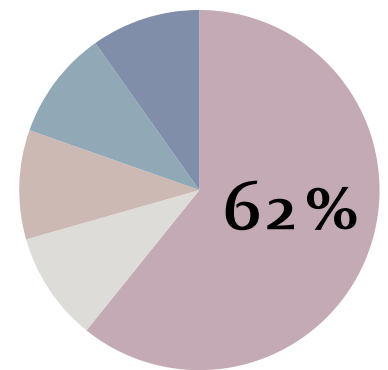
INTERVIEWS

FOCUS GROUPS

Hosted in each participating country, these sessions allowed for group discussions and exchanges of experiences, enriching the data with diverse perspectives and collaborative insights.

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Participant demographics

The study encompassed a wide range of professionals, primarily in managerial roles, across eight European countries. The demographic breakdown of the participants is as follows:

Professional roles

The majority of the participants (62%) were managers, supplemented by team leaders, HR staff, coaches, and trainers.

62%

64% **36%**

Gender distribution

Reflecting gender diversity in leadership, 64% of participants were women, and 36% were men, offering varied perspectives across gender lines.

Experience with burnout

A significant portion of participants had firsthand experience with burnout, both personally and within their teams. Specifically, 63% of managers reported personal encounters with burnout, while 74% observed it among their team members, highlighting the prevalence and impact of burnout in managerial roles.

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The Manager's Perspective

Having two sides to a story is crucial for a comprehensive and balanced understanding of any situation. In this part of our study, we have gathered insights from managers with diverse professional backgrounds and a variety of managerial and leading roles. The majority of the participants in this study were managers (62%). The rest were all in similar senior and leading roles, such as Team leaders, HR Staff, Coaches, and Trainers. Out of these, 64% were women and 36% were men.

To start tackling the widespread problem of burnout in the workplace and to address the prevalent issue of burnout within the workplace, it is noteworthy that a significant portion of the managers in the eight countries have firsthand experience with the issue of burnout. 63% of the managers have personally encountered burnout. Furthermore, 74% of the managers have experience with burnout among employees. This data highlights the urgent and imperative nature of addressing burnout, given its widespread impact on both managers and their teams.

15 identified challenges

01

Difficulty establishing personal connections

02

Creating and assimilating organizational culture

03

Difficulties in fostering team cohesion

04

Poor communication and insufficient feedback

05

Mental and emotional strain

06

Low employee motivation

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07

Variances in cultural and individual backgrounds

08

Issues with trust, either insufficient or misused

09

Distractions

10

Limited managerial control

11

Work-life balance

12

Lack of competencies

13

Inability to provide adequate training

14

Compliance and regulations

15

Lack of technical infrastructure

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Analysis through the Five Dimensions

Our study explores the multifaceted challenges faced by managers and leaders in remote work environments. Drawing insights from various European countries, we have categorized the 15 identified challenges into five key dimensions: Social, Personal, Cultural, Planning, and Practical. This report provides an in-depth analysis of each dimension, enriched by managerial perspectives and practical experiences across different cultural and organizational contexts.

SOCIAL DIMENSION

Challenges include difficulties in forming personal bonds, integrating into company culture, and feeling part of a team. Managers highlighted the importance of structured social interactions and proactive communication strategies to mitigate feelings of isolation and enhance team cohesion.

Conducted with over 81 managers, leaders, and coaches, the interviews offered in-depth qualitative insights into personal experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in remote work settings.

PERSONAL DIMENSION

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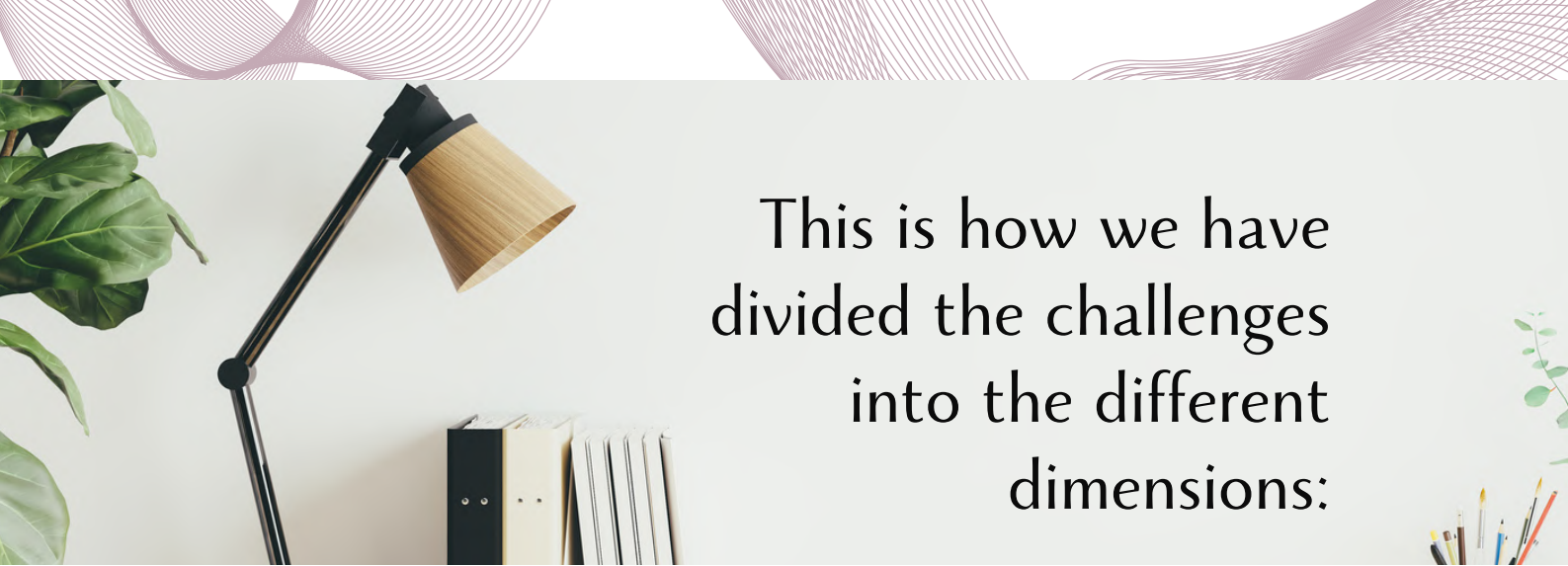
CULTURAL DIMENSION

Cultural and individual differences impact remote work dynamics, with an emphasis on trust and mutual understanding. Managers stressed the importance of cultural sensitivity and individualized approaches to foster a supportive remote work environment.

Distractions, lack of control, and work-life balance issues are prevalent in remote settings. Effective planning and time management strategies, alongside flexible work policies, were identified as key to addressing these challenges.

PLANNING DIMENSION

PRACTICAL DIMENSION

This includes lack of competencies, training opportunities, compliance with regulations, and technical infrastructure. Managers emphasized the need for ongoing skill development, robust IT support, and adherence to legal and safety standards in remote work setups.

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This is how we have divided the challenges into the different dimensions:

SOCIAL DIMENSION

Difficulties in fostering team cohesion.

Poor communication and insufficient feedback.

Lack of competencies.

PERSONAL DIMENSION

Difficulty establishing personal connections.

Mental and emotional strain.

Low employee motivation.

Variances in cultural and individual backgrounds.
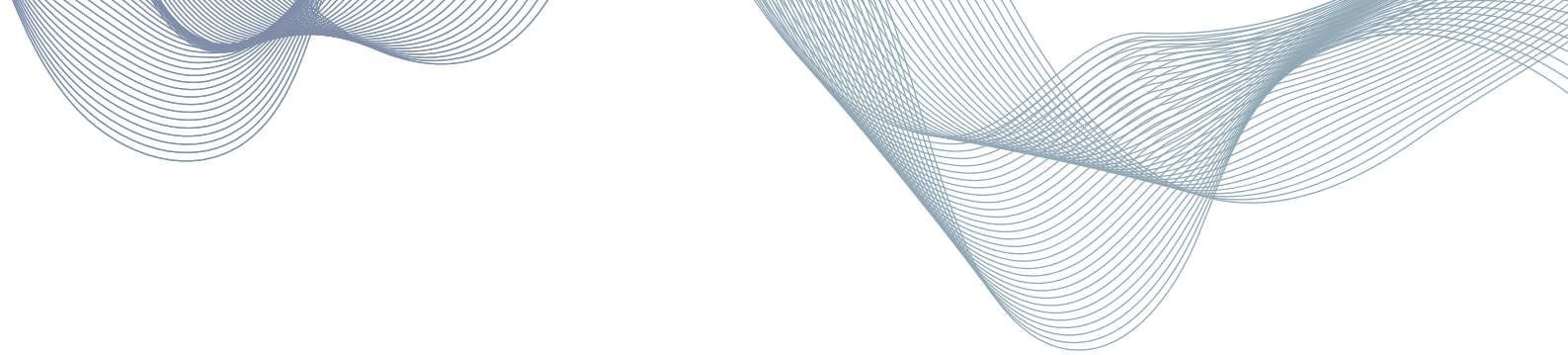
Work-life balance

CULTURAL DIMENSION

Creating and assimilating organizational culture.

Issues with trust, either insufficient or misused.

PLANNING DIMENSION

Distractions.

Limited managerial control.

PRACTICAL DIMENSION

Inability to provide adequate training.

Compliance and regulations.

Lack of technical infrastructure.

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To gain a comprehensive understanding of these challenges, we analyzed them through four analytical lenses:

01 Perception & Feeling

This perspective extends beyond mere facts to grasp the subjective experiences and emotions of managers dealing with remote work. It encompasses their insights on burnout, identifying problems, and devising effective management strategies.

Structure & Processes 02

This aspect examines the critical influence of organizational frameworks and methodologies on remote employee management. It underscores the necessity of structured methods for handling work, time, and daily routines in remote contexts. Effective structures and processes are pivotal, as they enable managers to lead teams more efficiently, particularly in remote environments where the lack of these elements can introduce additional challenges.

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03 Leadership & Self-Leadership

Our investigation delves into the nuances of leadership and self-direction in remote work scenarios. We explore the impact of absent in-person leadership and how managers can innovatively adapt to provide effective guidance from afar. The study reveals the growing need for, and the evolving nature of, leadership within remote or hybrid work settings. It underscores the heightened demand on leaders to develop enhanced communication skills and the ability to read others in the absence of physical interactions.

Culture & Norms 04

This lens focuses on the impact of cultural norms, the collective, accepted systems of beliefs and practices that define a cultural group. We analyzed how these norms shape daily interactions and influence the health and well-being of remote teams. Each challenge is viewed through this lens to understand the pivotal role cultural norms play in shaping team dynamics and overall group health.

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KEY FINDINGS AT GLANCE

● A significant 24% of managers regularly work overtime, indicating a potential normalization of extended working hours.

● While 57% of workplaces have mental health policies, a concerning 30% do not, signaling a gap in employee support structures.

● A majority (64%) agree on the priority of employee well-being

● 85% of managers report that they are aware of their influence on employee well-being.

● 92% would act upon noticing burnout in their team, but 60% lack or are unsure about strategies to prevent it.

● 39% of managers report an absence of policies regarding diversity, equity and inclusion, suggesting room for improvement.

● 75% view contacting employees outside work hours as inappropriate, but 25% do not recognize this as a crucial boundary.

● 42% have measures to motivate employees, while 38% do not believe motivation is solely the employee's responsibility.

● 40% think remote working is easy for employees, indicating varied perceptions on its challenges.

● 83% can recognize stress in employees, but only 45% model self-awareness and self-care effectively.

● High trust levels (84%) in employee performance are reported, with 93% of managers conducting regular check-ins.

● 40% disagree with the principle of counting any hours as long as work is completed.

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Regional differences (legal policies)

Analysis of remote work legislation in Poland, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Austria, Ireland, Spain, Greece, and Italy is provided, offering a comparative perspective on how different European countries approach remote work.

Poland

From April 7, 2023, Polish legislation allows for full or partial remote work, subject to agreement between the employee and employer. The new Labor Code provisions introduce "occasional remote work," allowing up to 24 days per year, requestable in paper or electronic form. This option is designed to offer flexibility for situations like family care needs.

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the focus is on balancing work and family life, with a trend towards increasing part-time work opportunities. This shift aims to prevent burnout and support gender equality in the workforce, where women comprise around 50% of the labor market.

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Sweden

Swedish laws, such as the Parental Leave Act, emphasize gender equality and work-life balance. While progressive, these policies may inadvertently affect women's career progression and earning potential due to longer parental leaves. The challenges of re-entering the workforce and managing remote work are also noted.

Austria

In Austria, nearly half of the labor force is female (47%), supported by public and private initiatives. The 2017 Austrian Action Plan for Women's Health, part of the annual Austrian Women's Health Dialogue, focuses on mental health, equal opportunities, and strengthening women's self-image.

Ireland

The 'Work-Life Balance Bill' in Ireland, awaiting finalization, will allow employees to request remote working. Employers must provide reasonable grounds for any refusal. The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) will publish a Code of Practice to guide the management of these requests.

Spain

Spain's remote working regulations, detailed in the Spanish Workers' Statute and Law 10/2021, require a formal agreement between employee and employer. The law mandates employer responsibility for work-related expenses and equipment, emphasizing voluntary and reversible nature of remote work arrangements.
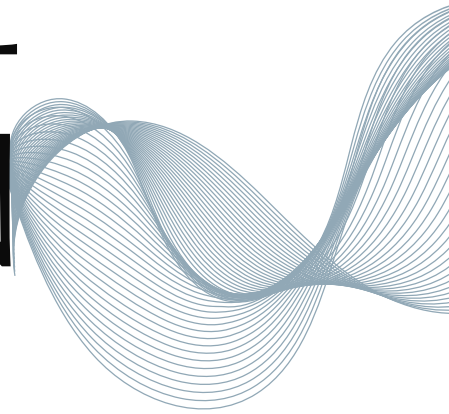
Greece

Greek law stipulates that employers cover the costs associated with teleworking, including equipment and maintenance. Technical support must be provided, with obligations extending to employee-owned equipment in certain circumstances.

Italy

Italian legislation (Legislative Decree n. 81/2017) outlines the framework for remote work, emphasizing mutual agreement and specific protections for parents and those with health conditions. The law differentiates between 'smart working' and 'teleworking,' each with unique regulations.

Many countries have passed legislation to address the new logistical and structural legal challenges that have arisen that have arisen due to new work models. However, the legislation varies from country to country, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. The legislation in each country reflects the unique needs and circumstances of that country. For example, some countries have focused on ensuring that employees have the right to disconnect from work outside normal working hours, while others have focused on ensuring that employees have access to the necessary equipment and tools. The differences in legislation can have an impact on the way that remote work is implemented and managed in different countries. It is important for employers and employees to be aware of the legislation in their country and to ensure that they are complying with it.

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THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

DIFFICULTIES IN FOSTERING TEAM COHESION

> *Collaboration and team building can be very difficult: It can be difficult to create a sense of togetherness and camaraderie among distant team members. It is also so challenging to develop trust, cooperation, and a strong team when there are no face-to-face encounters.*
>
> ~ Manager, Austria

> *Creating a serene and relaxed atmosphere in the workplace is essential to prevent burnout, and promote horizontal dialogue. Additionally, valuing the individual and team's work and always being kind helps maintain a certain balance.*
>
> ~ Manager, Italy

> *It is important to foster a sense of community and connection among remote workers with regular virtual social events, coffee breaks, and team-building activities.*
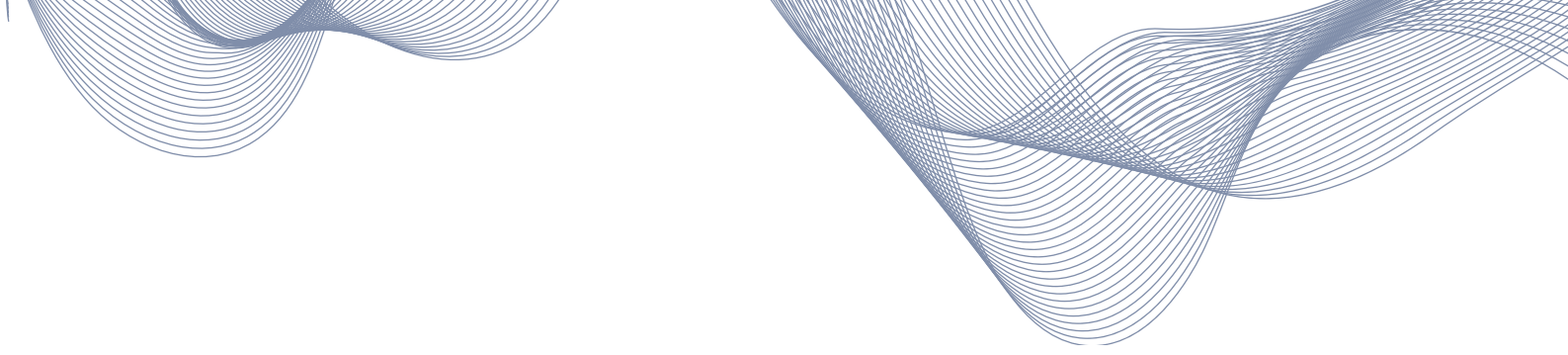>
> ~ Manager, Sweden

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In the dynamic world of remote work, one of the most prominent challenges faced by managers is fostering team cohesion. As teams become increasingly dispersed, physically separated by geographical distances, and often operating across various time zones, the traditional methods of building and maintaining a unified team spirit are no longer as effective. This new era of work demands innovative approaches to cultivate a sense of togetherness and collective purpose among team members who may never meet face-to-face.

The challenge of fostering team cohesion in a remote setting extends beyond simply connecting people through digital means. It encompasses the creation of a shared team identity, nurturing a sense of belonging, and ensuring that every team member feels valued and integrated. In remote teams, the absence of casual, in-person interactions that organically contribute to team bonding presents a unique obstacle. Managers must therefore be proactive and intentional in their efforts to bridge this gap.

This difficulty is compounded by the diverse nature of remote teams. Differences in cultural backgrounds, communication styles, and work preferences can lead to misunderstandings or feelings of isolation among team members. Managers are tasked with not only recognizing these differences but also leveraging them to enhance team dynamics and collaboration.

Perception & Feeling

This lens highlights the emotional and psychological aspects of the challenge. In remote settings, team members and managers might feel disconnected due to the lack of physical presence and informal interactions. This can lead to feelings of isolation or a sense of being out of sync with the team. For instance, a manager might perceive a decrease in team morale and find it challenging to gauge and address the emotional needs of team members who feel detached.

Structure & Processes

From this perspective, the challenge involves the creation and implementation of structures and processes that support team cohesion in a virtual environment. Without the natural bonding that occurs in a physical office, managers need to design deliberate activities and communication protocols to foster a sense of unity. An example of this could be difficulty in scheduling regular team meetings or activities that accommodate different time zones, hindering the development of a strong team bond.

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Leadership & Self-Leadership

 This angle focuses on the role of leadership in cultivating team cohesion. The challenge for managers is to lead by example in building a cohesive team, which includes developing skills in virtual team management and communication. Additionally, self-leadership is crucial as managers must continuously learn and adapt to the changing dynamics of remote work. A common challenge might be a manager's inability to effectively mediate conflicts or facilitate team-building activities in a virtual setting, which are essential for maintaining team unity.

Culture & Norms

Through this lens, the challenge is seen in the context of cultural diversity and norms within remote teams. Managers must navigate and harmonize different cultural expectations and working styles, which can be a complex task in a remote environment. For example, a manager might struggle to create a team culture that respects and integrates diverse communication styles and work habits, potentially leading to misunderstandings and a lack of cohesive team identity.

POOR COMMUNICATION

AND INSUFFICIENT FEEDBACK

Managers from different focus groups discussed the challenges encompassed by communication difficulties due to the absence of face-to-face interaction and potential motivation issues stemming from the lack of social interaction. 'Clear Communication is vital' was the consensus of the majority of participants. Workplaces need clear guidelines and communication to prevent stress and uncertainty.

One manager stated:

Remote work is like an iceberg; we only see the tip of it, or basically what employees want to show us. I've experienced stubbornness from some employees who were not good when working remotely, still, they didn't want to admit that remote work might not be for them. Remote work is a right of everyone but it does not work for everyone.

- Manager Austria

Highlighting the need for individual solutions, you can argue that the employee in this case didn't understand or wanted to reveal their inability to deliver but you could also argue that there is a lack of support and guidance from the managers, who in the end are responsible for the result.

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Feedback, how to give and perceive feedback is perceived as a bigger challenge working remotely. One manager emphasized the need for a feedback structure.

> *Establish a regular feedback mechanism where employees can voice their concerns, challenges, or suggestions related to remote work.*
>
> – Manager, Sweden

Perception & Feeling

This lens focuses on the emotional and psychological effects of communication barriers in remote work. Managers may feel disconnected from their team, leading to a lack of understanding of their team's true sentiments and concerns. Employees, in turn, might feel undervalued or unheard, creating a sense of isolation. For instance, the Austrian manager's analogy of remote work as an 'iceberg' reflects this perspective, indicating that only a fraction of employee issues are visible to management, leaving deeper problems unrecognized and unaddressed.

Structure & Processes

From this perspective, the challenge lies in establishing effective communication channels and feedback mechanisms in a remote setting. Without structured processes, crucial information can be missed, and employees may not receive the guidance they need. The suggestion from the Swedish manager to establish a regular feedback mechanism exemplifies the need for structured processes that ensure consistent and clear communication, enabling managers to stay informed and responsive to their team's needs.

Leadership & Self-Leadership

This aspect highlights the role of leadership skills in addressing communication issues. The challenge for managers is to lead by example, demonstrating effective communication, and actively seeking feedback. It also involves self-reflection and self-improvement in communication skills. The Austrian manager's experience with employee stubbornness points to a need for leaders to develop strategies to engage with and support employees who may struggle with remote work, ensuring open lines of communication

Culture & Norms

The challenge here is about aligning and integrating diverse communication styles and expectations across different cultural backgrounds within remote teams. Managers must navigate these differences to create an inclusive communication culture where all team members feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feedback. One manager said "Talk to somebody. If the workload feels too heavy, see if you can share it. Open communication is so important" Manager Ireland

Of course that requires a culture where it feels ok and you're encouraged to share those feelings without consequences. The issue raised by the Swedish manager about establishing a feedback structure also reflects this need, highlighting how cultural norms around communication and feedback can vary and the importance of accommodating these differences in a remote setting.

LACK OF COMPETENCIES

In the swiftly evolving landscape of remote work, a critical challenge that consistently surfaces is the lack of competencies among managers. As organizations transition to remote or hybrid models, the skill sets required for effective management undergo a significant transformation. Traditional managerial skills, while still relevant, are no longer sufficient. Managers find themselves navigating an entirely new terrain, where competencies in digital communication, virtual team leadership, and remote employee engagement become paramount.

This challenge is not just about the technical skills required to use remote work tools but also encompasses a broader spectrum of competencies. These include the ability to maintain team cohesion without physical presence, understanding the nuances of virtual team dynamics, and the capability to support the well-being of team members from a distance. Furthermore, managers are required to be adept in handling the complexities that arise from a dispersed workforce, such as coordinating across time zones, managing virtual workflows, and fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion among remote employees.

The lack of these competencies can lead to a range of issues, from decreased team productivity and morale to increased feelings of isolation among employees. As the nature of work continues to evolve, equipping managers with the right skills and competencies for remote leadership becomes not just beneficial, but essential for the success and sustainability of remote work arrangements.

Perception & Feeling

From this lens, the challenge is tied to the feelings and perceptions of inadequacy or unpreparedness among managers. They might feel overwhelmed or anxious about not having the necessary skills to effectively lead a remote team. This can lead to a decrease in confidence and affect their decision-making abilities. An example of this is a manager feeling uncertain about using digital tools for team collaboration, which can hinder effective communication and create a barrier in connecting with the team.

Structure & Processes

Through this perspective, the challenge is seen in the context of organizational systems and workflows. The lack of competencies might manifest in inefficient or inadequate structures for remote work. Managers might struggle to implement effective remote working processes or fail to adapt existing workflows to suit a virtual environment. For instance, a manager may find it challenging to coordinate team activities across different time zones due to a lack of experience in remote scheduling and planning.

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Leadership & Self-Leadership

This angle highlights the challenge in the realm of leadership development and self-improvement. Managers may face difficulties in leading and motivating their teams from a distance due to a lack of training in remote leadership. The challenge also lies in self-leadership, where managers need to recognize their skill gaps and seek opportunities for personal development. An example here could be a manager struggling to maintain team morale remotely, not having developed the necessary skills to engage and inspire their team virtually.

Culture & Norms

From the cultural perspective, the challenge involves integrating and adapting to diverse work practices and expectations in a remote setting. Managers may lack the competencies required to manage a culturally diverse team, leading to miscommunications and a lack of cohesion. This is evident when a manager fails to recognize and address cultural differences in communication styles, which can result in misunderstandings and decreased team effectiveness.

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THE PERSONAL DIMENSION

DIFFICULTY ESTABLISHING PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

The ability to connect personally with employees is not just a nicety; it's a critical component of effective leadership. Personal connections foster trust, enhance team cohesion, and are essential for understanding and responding to the individual needs of team members. However, in the absence of face-to-face interactions, managers must find new ways to bridge the physical distance. They need to create an environment where meaningful connections can flourish despite the lack of physical proximity.

This challenge is particularly pronounced in remote settings, where digital communication replaces the nuances of in-person interactions. Managers must adapt their leadership styles to maintain a sense of connection and engagement, ensuring that each team member feels seen, heard, and valued. This transition calls for a reimagining of traditional management practices and a deeper understanding of the tools and techniques that facilitate connection in a digital world.

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Perception & Feeling:

The challenge to create connections can be rooted in the emotional and psychological impact of a remote work setting, creating new structures and behaviors that managers need to adapt to. As employees, managers might struggle with a sense of disconnection from their team, leading to feelings of isolation and a decreased ability to empathize with team members. Many participants in our study spoke about the difficulties in 'Reading a room', let alone forming relationships and bonds especially if there has been no previous in-person contact. It requires knowledge, know-how on how to communicate and connect and a transparency about the fact that no one has the correct answers, we are all trying to figure it out and that complexity will always exist when talking about making connections since we are humans.

ken for granted.

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Structure & Processes:

The challenge here involves the difficulty in replicating the spontaneous and organic interactions that occur in a physical office setting. Managers might find it hard to create structures that encourage casual yet meaningful interactions in a virtual environment. An example is the struggle to facilitate informal 'water cooler' conversations in a digital workspace, which are crucial for building personal connections and understanding team dynamics. In an 'in-person' work day, there would be a structure to the day, a beginning, a middle, and an end, and everyone would similarly travel through this day, having coffee breaks, water cooler moments, lunch breaks, entering the building, leaving the building etc, all of these processes hold within them the opportunity to form social bonds, without them, it is difficult for the natural flow to appear. But it doesn't mean that we can't create new structures and adapt to a new digital environment, it highlights the importance of taking time and energy into creating new forms that work in a new environment, something that we might before have taken for granted.

Leadership & Self-Leadership:

From this perspective, the challenge is adapting leadership styles to suit remote interactions. Managers face the difficulty of providing effective guidance and support without the benefit of physical presence and non-verbal cues. A common example is the challenge of conducting performance reviews remotely, where understanding subtle cues about an employee's reactions and comfort levels is harder, potentially leading to less effective feedback and guidance.

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Culture & Norms:

The challenge here lies in accepting that we have to adapt to change, managers have to accept the fact that surroundings are different and start navigating and integrating new forms of working. Some things such as how we build bonds between colleagues might have been a skill that we took for granted in a physical world where we now have to find new ways.

With the expanding global talent pool, another perspective emerges, the challenge of harmonizing the diverse cultural norms of remote teams hailing from different parts of the world. Crafting a cohesive team culture that embraces the wide array of backgrounds and practices of team members can be a significant undertaking. For instance, a manager might find it challenging to establish a common ground for team interactions that respects different time zones, communication styles, and work-life boundaries, leading to potential misunderstandings and conflicts.

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MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL STRAIN

> *When you can't see your employees, you can't see their struggle. You have to rely on them to tell you. This does not always happen. With remote working, it is harder to see the red flags that would signal depression or mental health issues.*

- Manager, Ireland

In the rapidly evolving landscape of remote work, a significant yet often understated challenge for managers is identifying and addressing mental and emotional strain in their team members. The shift to remote work has redefined workplace interactions and environments, leading to new stressors that can impact employees' mental health and emotional well-being. This situation poses a unique challenge for managers who are now required to be more attuned to the subtle signs of distress that can easily go unnoticed in a virtual setting.

The absence of physical cues and the inherent limitations of digital communication make it more difficult for managers to detect changes in an employee's behavior or mood that might indicate stress or emotional difficulties. This challenge is compounded by the fact that employees working remotely may feel less inclined to share their struggles openly, either due to the impersonal nature of virtual interactions or the perceived lack of a supportive environment.

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Moreover, the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life in remote settings can further exacerbate mental and emotional strain among employees. Managers are now faced with the task of not only recognizing these signs but also providing appropriate support and resources while respecting the personal boundaries of their team members.

Perception & Feeling

The challenge lies in understanding and empathizing with the emotional state of remote employees. In a remote work setting, managers might struggle to perceive the subtle emotional cues that are more evident in face-to-face interactions. For example, a manager might not easily notice signs of stress or burnout in a team member during virtual meetings, as opposed to in-person settings where body language and other non-verbal cues are more observable.

Structure & Processes

> **When employees feel depressed their work is affected. They lose enthusiasm and focus. Talking and having regular link-ins and check-ups is so important as part of the work-life structure.**
>
> – **Manager, Ireland.**

The challenge is to develop and implement effective communication channels and support systems that allow for the identification and addressing of mental and emotional issues. An example of this challenge is creating a process for regular check-ins that are sensitive enough to identify emotional distress, which can be easily masked in standard reporting or formal meeting structures.

Leadership & Self-Leadership:

Through this angle, the challenge is related to the leadership skills required to recognize and address mental and emotional strain. Managers need to develop a heightened level of emotional intelligence and the ability to lead with empathy. This includes being proactive in asking about and listening to employees' concerns. A manager might struggle with how to approach sensitive conversations or how to provide support without encroaching on personal boundaries, especially in a remote setting.

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Culture & Norms:

From the cultural perspective, the challenge involves creating and maintaining a work culture that acknowledges and supports mental and emotional health. In remote teams, establishing a culture where it's safe to express vulnerabilities and seek help can be difficult. Managers must navigate diverse cultural norms regarding mental health and emotional expression. For instance, in some cultures, there may be a stigma attached to discussing mental health issues, making it more challenging for employees from those backgrounds to open up about their struggles.

Each perspective brings to light different aspects of the challenge in noticing mental and emotional strain in remote employees, underscoring the multifaceted approach needed to effectively support team members' well-being in a remote work environment.

LOW EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

In the evolving realm of remote work, a recurrent and significant challenge identified by managers is the perception of low employee motivation. This issue, raised frequently in both focus group discussions and individual interviews with managers, points to the complexities of sustaining both team and individual motivation in a virtual work environment. The transition to remote work can disrupt established personal and professional routines, blurring the lines between work and personal life, and consequently, impacting motivation levels.

Managers are finding that traditional motivational strategies are not always effective in remote settings. The absence of physical presence and the change in work dynamics mean that new approaches and skills are needed to inspire and maintain motivation. Discussions have revolved around the delicate balance of instilling trust without resorting to micromanagement, and keeping team members focused on goals without losing sight of their well-being.

As noted by a manager from Austria

> *Motivated employees are great, but so are healthy ones. So a good balance is important.*
>
> — **Manager Austria.**

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Perception & Feeling

In the remote work environment, managers often face challenges in accurately perceiving their team members' motivation levels, primarily due to the absence of direct observation opportunities typical in traditional office settings. This can lead to misinterpretations; for example, an employee's quietness in virtual meetings might be mistakenly seen as a lack of motivation, when in reality, it could be attributed to a less comfortable communication style in remote settings or other underlying factors.

Perception and feelings significantly influence motivation, and it's crucial for managers to consider them. A lack of clear goals, for instance, can lead to confusion and frustration among team members. Similarly, feelings of boredom, stress, and burnout are critical factors that can diminish motivation. Furthermore, underlying psychological burdens such as depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and occupational burnout can profoundly impact an employee's motivation levels. It's essential for managers to recognize these subtle cues and underlying emotional states. Addressing such issues may require seeking guidance and new knowledge and might even require external expertise.

Structure & Processes

This perspective focuses on the organizational frameworks and processes that support or hinder motivation in remote work. The challenge lies in adapting or creating structures that foster motivation without the physical oversight possible in an office. For example, managers might find it challenging to implement effective remote performance-tracking systems that motivate employees while avoiding the pitfalls of micromanagement.

Leadership & Self-Leadership

From a leadership standpoint, the challenge involves developing skills and strategies to motivate team members remotely. Managers need to lead with empathy and understanding, recognizing the diverse factors that influence motivation in a remote context. A significant challenge could be a manager's ability to inspire and engage their team through virtual means, which requires a different approach compared to face-to-face interactions.

Culture & Norms

Here, the focus is on the cultural aspects of motivation in remote teams. The challenge for managers is to create and sustain a team culture that promotes motivation across diverse cultural backgrounds. Different cultural norms around work and motivation can lead to varying expectations and perceptions. An example is managing a team with members from cultures where self-motivation is highly valued versus cultures where motivation is more externally driven, requiring different management approaches.

VARIANCES IN CULTURAL AND INDIVIDUAL BACKGROUNDS.

> *In the case of women working remotely and who have families, more flexibility and understanding is needed, when this is in place, it makes for very good working relationships as there is understanding and respect, and makes for a very good work environment. Understanding is the key.*
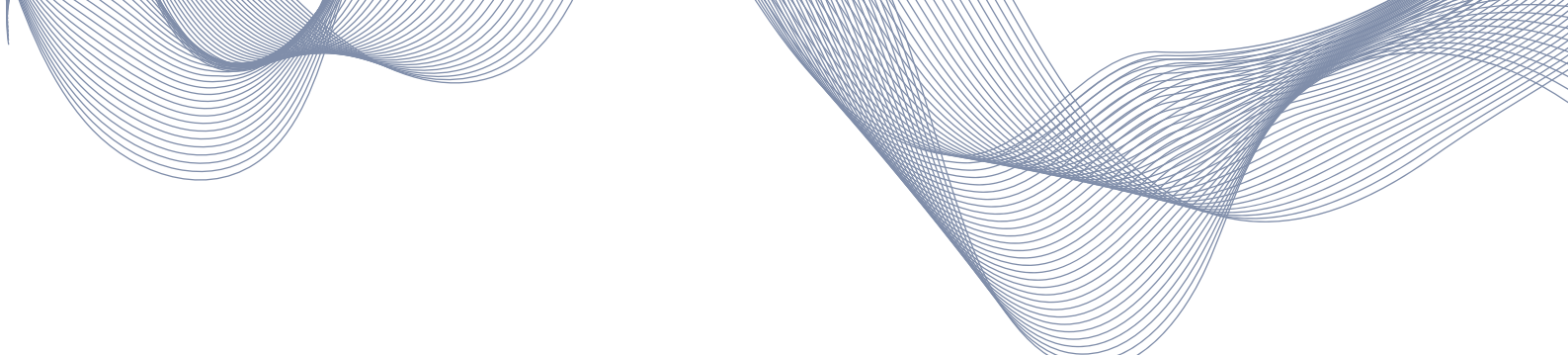>
> – Manager, Ireland.

In the increasingly globalized and diverse world of remote work, one of the nuanced challenges that managers face is navigating the variances in cultural and individual backgrounds of their team members. As remote work breaks down geographical barriers, it brings together a mosaic of individuals from various cultural, social, and professional backgrounds. This diversity, while a valuable asset, introduces complex dynamics that managers must skillfully navigate to ensure effective team collaboration and mutual understanding.

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The challenge lies not only in the obvious differences such as language and time zones but also in the subtler aspects of cultural nuances, communication styles, work ethics, and individual expectations. These variances can lead to misunderstandings, miscommunications, and even conflicts, affecting team cohesion and productivity. Managers in this environment must be adept at recognizing and respecting these differences, and more importantly, leveraging them to enrich the team's overall performance and experience.

Furthermore, individual backgrounds go beyond cultural aspects and encompass personal experiences, educational backgrounds, and personality traits. Each team member's unique perspective contributes to how they approach work, interact with others, and perceive their role within the team. Managers face the task of creating an inclusive environment where these diverse perspectives are acknowledged and valued, ensuring that every team member feels included and empowered to contribute fully.

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Perception & Feeling

From this perspective, the challenge involves understanding and empathizing with the diverse emotional and psychological backgrounds of team members. Managers may struggle to appreciate how cultural and individual differences influence team members' perceptions and reactions in various situations. For instance, a manager might not fully grasp the significance of cultural nuances in communication, leading to misunderstandings or feelings of exclusion among team members from different cultural backgrounds.

Structure & Processes

Here, the challenge lies in establishing structures and processes that accommodate and respect diverse working styles and cultural norms. In a remote setting, managers need to create systems that allow for flexible working hours to cater to different time zones, as well as communication and collaboration methods that suit various cultural preferences. An example is the difficulty in scheduling team meetings that are convenient for everyone or in choosing collaboration tools that are universally accessible and user-friendly.

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Leadership & Self-Leadership

This lens highlights the challenge for managers to adapt their leadership style to effectively manage a culturally diverse team. Leaders must develop cultural competence, the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. They also need to practice self-leadership by being aware of their own cultural biases and learning how to manage them. A common challenge might be a leader's ability to mediate conflicts that arise from cultural misunderstandings or to motivate team members who have different cultural perspectives on work and authority.

Culture & Norms

From the cultural perspective, the challenge involves creating an inclusive team culture that embraces and leverages cultural and individual diversity. Managers must foster an environment where differences are not just tolerated but are seen as assets. This includes acknowledging and celebrating cultural holidays, being mindful of language barriers, and encouraging open discussions about cultural norms. An example of this challenge is integrating team members who have different approaches to work-life balance or different expectations regarding feedback and communication styles.

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WORK-LIFE BALANCE

> *Given the challenges of boundarylessness, allowing employees to have flexible schedules can help them find a balance between work and personal commitments.*
>
> — Manager, Sweden

> *If people learn to manage and balance their work-life balance it provides them with a wonderful opportunity to feel good and feel a sense of well-being.*
>
> — Manager, Ireland

> *Parenthood can be one of the biggest challenges. Parents (regardless of gender) find it hard to work from home without feeling obliged to take care of their children during their working time*
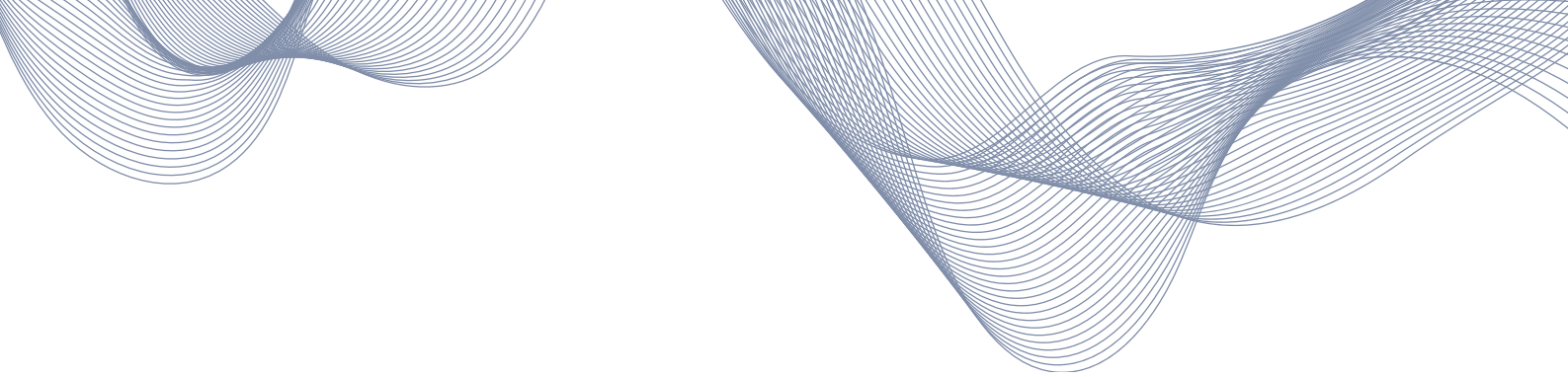>
> — Manager, Austria

> *With overtime, there needs to be give and take. At times it's necessary. But if someone comes in early, they should be allowed to go early if possible*
>
> — Manager, Ireland

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In the landscape of remote work, a significant challenge that has emerged prominently is helping employees maintain a healthy work-life balance. This challenge, underscored by various managers across different regions, encompasses the complexities of blurring boundaries between professional and personal life. The transition to working from home has dissolved the traditional physical separation between these spheres, often leading to difficulties in managing time and commitments effectively.

A manager from Sweden highlights the importance of flexible schedules as a means to mitigate the challenges of this boundarylessness. Flexibility allows employees to tailor their work hours to harmonize with personal commitments, thereby facilitating a better balance. Echoing this sentiment, a manager from Ireland points out the profound impact of a well-managed work-life balance on employees' overall sense of well-being and fulfillment.

The challenge is further complicated by additional responsibilities, such as parenthood, as noted by a manager from Austria. Parents often find themselves juggling work tasks and childcare simultaneously, a situation that can lead to increased stress and decreased productivity. This dual role, especially in a home environment, underscores the need for understanding and supportive work policies.

Another aspect, as a manager from Ireland suggests, is the management of overtime. The give-and-take approach, where early arrivals could correspond to early departures, is proposed as a solution to prevent burnout and maintain balance. This approach reflects the need for reciprocal understanding between employers and employees in managing working hours.

As we delve into this theme, we will explore the multifaceted nature of work-life balance in remote work settings. We will examine the strategies and practices that managers employ to support their teams in achieving a harmonious balance, ensuring that employees remain productive, motivated, and healthy.

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Perception & Feeling

Through this lens, the challenge focuses on the emotional and psychological impact of blurred work-life boundaries on employees. Managers may find it difficult to understand how remote work affects the personal lives and well-being of their team members. For instance, employees working from home might experience increased stress due to the inability to disconnect from work, leading to burnout. This is particularly challenging for parents, as noted by the Austrian manager, who might feel torn between work duties and childcare.

Structure & Processes

From a structural viewpoint, the challenge lies in creating and implementing work policies and processes that support work-life balance. The need for flexible schedules, as highlighted by the Swedish manager, demonstrates the importance of adaptable work arrangements. Managers need to ensure that such structures are in place to allow employees to manage their work and personal commitments effectively, without leading to overwork or burnout.

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Leadership & Self-Leadership

Here, the focus is on the role of leadership in promoting and modeling work-life balance. Managers need to lead by example, demonstrating healthy work-life boundaries themselves. This includes recognizing the importance of taking breaks, managing workloads, and respecting employees' personal time. The Irish manager's approach to managing overtime reflects the need for a balanced leadership approach that values both the employees' contributions and their personal time.

> *With overtime, there needs to be give and take. At times it's necessary. But if someone comes in early, they should be allowed to go early if possible.*
>
> – Manager, Sweden

Culture & Norms

From a cultural perspective, the challenge involves establishing a team culture that values and supports work-life balance. Managers must foster an environment where it's acceptable and encouraged to prioritize personal well-being alongside work responsibilities. This includes creating a culture of trust where employees feel comfortable utilizing flexible work arrangements without fear of being perceived as less committed to their work.

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THE CULTURAL DIMENSION

CREATING AND ASSIMILATING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

In the evolving world of remote work, one of the more nuanced and complex challenges that managers face is creating and assimilating an organizational culture that resonates across dispersed teams. The transition to remote work has fundamentally altered how organizational culture is experienced and maintained, posing unique challenges in fostering a shared sense of identity, values, and norms among employees who may be spread across different regions and time zones.

The essence of organizational culture traditionally thrives on physical interactions and shared experiences within a communal workspace. In its absence, managers are tasked with the challenge of translating and sustaining these cultural elements in a virtual environment. This includes maintaining a sense of connectedness, ensuring that the organization's values and goals are clearly communicated and embodied in day-to-day operations, and fostering a sense of belonging among remote employees.

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The challenge is assimilating new employees into the company's culture without in-person onboarding, requiring managers to find innovative ways to integrate them and convey the organization's values effectively.

Perception & Feeling

From this perspective, the challenge centers on how employees perceive and emotionally connect with the organization's culture in a remote environment. Without the physical cues and informal interactions of an office, employees might feel disconnected from the core values and ethos of the organization. This can lead to a sense of isolation or a lack of belonging. For instance, remote employees might struggle to feel a part of the company's culture or miss out on the emotional bonds that develop through face-to-face interactions.

Structure & Processes

Structurally, the challenge lies in establishing processes and systems that effectively convey and reinforce the organizational culture in a virtual setting. This includes developing communication strategies, virtual team-building activities, and digital rituals that mirror and reinforce the culture. A specific challenge here could be creating virtual onboarding processes that effectively assimilate new employees into the organizational culture, ensuring they understand and embrace the company's values and norms.

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Leadership & Self-Leadership

Through the lens of leadership, the challenge involves leading by example and actively promoting the organizational culture in a remote context. Leaders need to be the embodiment of the company's values and find innovative ways to express and reinforce these values remotely. This could involve adapting leadership styles to more effectively communicate and engage with team members, ensuring the organizational culture is consistently represented and felt, despite the lack of physical interaction.

Culture & Norms

From a cultural perspective, the challenge is in maintaining a unified set of norms and practices that define the organizational culture, despite geographical and cultural differences among remote employees. Managers must navigate these differences and foster an inclusive culture that embraces diversity while maintaining a cohesive organizational identity. An example of this challenge is ensuring that cultural practices and celebrations are inclusive and resonate with a diverse workforce, reinforcing a sense of unity and shared cultural understanding.

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ISSUES WITH TRUST, EITHER INSUFFICIENT OR MISUSED

> *It is challenging to develop trust, cooperation, and a strong team culture when there are no face-to-face encounters.*

— Manager, Austria

> *Trust needs to be built first. Depending on the context and previous experiences, this might take approximately one year.*
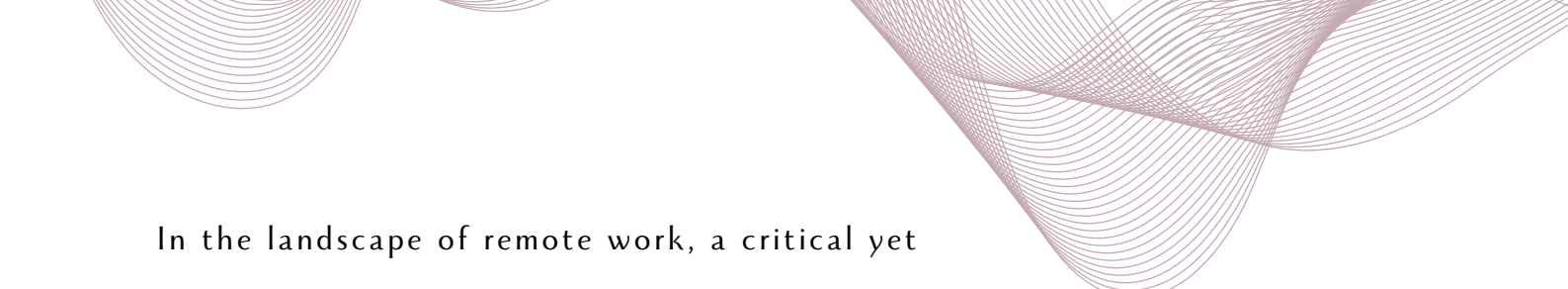
— Manager, Austria

> *Develop activities that promote communication and trust among employees and between administration and staff.*

— Manager, Greece

> *Whilst being on a meeting, people are often trying to catch up with other work and do something else instead of concentrating on the meeting.*

— Manager, Poland

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In the landscape of remote work, a critical yet often subtle challenge faced by managers is navigating issues of trust, whether it's a matter of building sufficient trust or addressing its misuse. The absence of face-to-face interactions, a cornerstone of traditional office environments, significantly complicates the dynamics of trust within teams. As a manager from Austria points out, developing trust, cooperation, and a strong team culture is particularly challenging without the benefit of in-person encounters.

> The process of building trust in a remote setting can be slow and requires consistent effort and intentionality. Another insight from Austria highlights that depending on various factors, including context and past experiences, establishing a solid foundation of trust can take a considerable amount of time, sometimes up to a year. This prolonged timeline underscores the complexities involved in fostering trust remotely, where interactions are mediated through screens and often lack the nuances of in-person communication.

Furthermore, the challenge of trust is not just about its development but also about its potential misuse. A manager from Poland notes a common issue in remote meetings: people multitasking and not fully engaging, which can erode trust. Such behaviors, while perhaps a response to the increased pressures of remote work, can lead to doubts about commitment and accountability, further complicating the trust dynamic.

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Perception & Feeling

Trust issues in remote work often revolve around the emotional connection and confidence between team members and managers. The lack of face-to-face interactions can lead to feelings of uncertainty and skepticism. For example, a manager might feel unsure about an employee's engagement and productivity without visual cues, while employees might feel their managers don't trust them to work independently, leading to a sense of being undervalued or micromanaged.

Structure & Processes

Structurally, the challenge lies in creating processes that foster trust without direct oversight. In a remote setting, traditional methods of monitoring and assessment might not be effective or appropriate. The difficulty is in establishing systems that ensure accountability and transparency, such as regular check-ins or project management tools while avoiding an atmosphere of surveillance. This includes balancing the need for oversight with respecting employees' autonomy and privacy.

Leadership & Self-Leadership

The challenge involves developing a leadership style that builds and maintains trust in a remote context. Leaders must navigate the fine line between providing support and oversight without overstepping into micromanagement. This requires a high degree of self-awareness and adaptability, as well as skills in communication and empathy. Leaders must also build their own credibility by being reliable, consistent, and transparent in their interactions.

Culture & Norms

Culturally, the challenge is creating an organizational culture that inherently values and fosters trust. This includes establishing and maintaining norms that promote open communication, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. For instance, a culture that encourages team members to openly discuss their workloads and challenges can help mitigate feelings of mistrust or misunderstanding. It also involves cultivating an environment where multitasking during meetings, as mentioned by the manager from Poland, is discouraged in favor of full engagement and presence.

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THE PLANNING DIMENSION

> *Remote work offers flexibility, but it can also blur the lines between work and personal life. I found out that offering regular individual check-ins just by calling a person on a phone, like old school style, can help.*

- Manager, Czech Republic

> *Let's be real, remote work can sometimes make you feel like you're always 'on.' We're all about preventing burnout and helping our remote crew find that sweet work-life balance but sometimes it's just really hard since everyone is in a different situation and needs something different. -*

- HR Manager, Czech Republic

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DISTRACTIONS

Distractions when working remotely can be higher, especially for mothers.

> *Mothers are often seen by their children once they are at home and are therefore more easily interrupted or distracted from work*
>
> – Manager, Austria

> *Good time organization improves one's concentration and avoids distractions, which then leads to better control of one's work.*
>
> – Manager, Spain

> *The practice of self-care and proper time management can work miracles in avoiding or dealing with burnout*
>
> – Manager, Greece

In the shifting landscape of remote work, a prevalent challenge that has come to the forefront is managing distractions. While working from home offers numerous benefits, it also introduces a range of distractions that can impede productivity and focus. This challenge is multifaceted, affecting different individuals in various ways depending on their circumstances and personal attributes.

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A manager from Austria highlights a specific challenge for mothers, who, when working from home, are more visible to their children and thus more susceptible to interruptions. This observation underscores how the merging of professional and personal spaces can lead to increased distractions, particularly for those with caregiving responsibilities.

Conversely, a manager from Spain points to good time organization as a key factor in mitigating distractions, suggesting that structured planning and discipline are essential for maintaining focus. This view is echoed in the broader discussion about the nature of remote work, which requires a high level of self-discipline and self-awareness, especially for individuals who are naturally more prone to distractions.

The emotional and psychological aspects of distractions are also significant. As noted, our emotions and feelings can be substantial distractions, drawing attention away from work tasks. The practice of self-care and effective time management, as mentioned by a manager from Greece, is crucial in managing these types of distractions and preventing burnout.

Perception & Feeling

The challenge involves understanding how distractions are perceived and how they affect the emotional state of remote workers. For some, like mothers noted by the Austrian manager, home distractions can lead to feelings of being torn between work and family responsibilities. This can cause stress and guilt. For others, internal distractions such as emotions or lack of focus can lead to frustration and decreased job satisfaction. Understanding these personal and emotional aspects is key to addressing the challenge effectively.

Structure & Processes

Structurally, the challenge is about creating and maintaining work processes that help minimize distractions. As the Spanish manager suggests, good time organization is crucial. This might involve establishing clear work schedules, setting up dedicated workspaces, or implementing tools and techniques for better task management. The challenge is in developing processes that are flexible enough to accommodate different home environments and personal work styles, while still providing structure and minimizing distractions.

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Leadership & Self-Leadership

 From a leadership perspective, the challenge involves modeling and encouraging practices that reduce distractions. Leaders must demonstrate focus and discipline, as noted, but also support their team in developing these skills. This includes understanding each team member's unique challenges and offering tailored support. Self-leadership is equally important, as individuals need to be aware of their own distraction triggers and actively work to manage them, a point emphasized by the manager from Greece regarding self-care and time management.

Culture & Norms

Culturally, the challenge is in navigating and respecting different attitudes towards distractions, as they can vary significantly across cultures. For example, some cultures may have more relaxed attitudes towards multitasking or family interruptions during work hours. Managers need to foster a culture that respects these differences while still promoting practices that help maintain focus and productivity. This might involve setting team norms around virtual meeting etiquette or communication expectations.

LIMITED MANAGERIAL CONTROL

> *Deadlines were not met; employees tend to procrastinate with the tasks and therefore when done in the last minute, tasks often lack the expected quality; When working from home, some people choose late evening hours, which for me as leader was problematic because in these case I didn't have any free time during the day.*
>
> – Manager, Austria

Control in a remote work setting is a nuanced concept, heavily reliant on perception. For managers, the shift to remote work demands a reevaluation of traditional control mechanisms, pivoting towards a foundation of trust. This adjustment is crucial, as visible oversight is replaced by an implicit trust that employees will fulfill their responsibilities. Reflecting on this from a managerial perspective, I see the challenge as multifaceted, encompassing perception, structure, leadership, and cultural norms.

Perception & Feeling

The perception of control in a remote environment is more psychological than physical. Managers accustomed to direct oversight may feel a loss of control, which can breed anxiety and uncertainty. This is compounded by the fact that control, in essence, is about trust – trusting that team members are productive and responsible even when not physically observed. Managers need to shift their mindset from equating visibility with productivity to fostering a culture where trust and accountability are paramount.

Structure & Processes

In remote work, structures and processes need to be reoriented to support this trust-based approach. This involves setting clear expectations, deliverables, and deadlines rather than focusing on monitoring work hours or methods. For instance, rather than tracking the number of hours worked, an alternative is to emphasize outcome-based assessments. This approach not only respects employees' autonomy but also reinforces the trust that they will complete their tasks effectively, irrespective of the time or place of work.

Leadership & Self-Leadership

Effective leadership in a remote setting is characterized by the ability to inspire trust and to delegate with confidence. As a manager, it is essential to communicate openly, provide clear guidance, and show confidence in the team's abilities. This leadership style not only empowers employees but also helps in building a mutual trust relationship. Self-leadership, in this context, involves managers being self-aware and recognizing their tendencies to over-control, actively working to build trust in their team's capabilities.

Culture & Norms

Culturally, remote work challenges managers to create an environment where trust is a fundamental norm. This requires a deliberate effort to foster a culture where employees feel valued, supported, and trusted. Such a culture encourages open communication, transparency, and a shared understanding that everyone is working towards common goals. It is about creating a sense of community and belonging, even in a dispersed work setting.

THE PRACTICAL DIMENSION
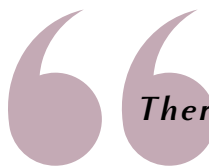
INABILITY TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE TRAINING

Occasionally, it becomes necessary to offer and encourage training in the workplace to foster confidence and development opportunities. Building confidence can often be a more significant challenge for women than for men in professional settings.

— Manager, Ireland

From the manager's point of view, it is difficult, the inability to focus on the problems faced by each employee individually and the inability to train the new employees from the most experienced one.

— Manager, Greece

There is a big need for a leader who can teach the newly hired remote employees

— Manager, Spain

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In the realm of remote work, managers are increasingly confronted with the challenge of providing adequate training to their teams. This issue has multiple facets, ranging from fostering confidence and personal development opportunities to addressing the unique needs of individual employees. The transition to remote work has amplified these challenges, as traditional, in-person training methods are no longer feasible or as effective. Insights from managers across various regions illuminate the complexities of this challenge.
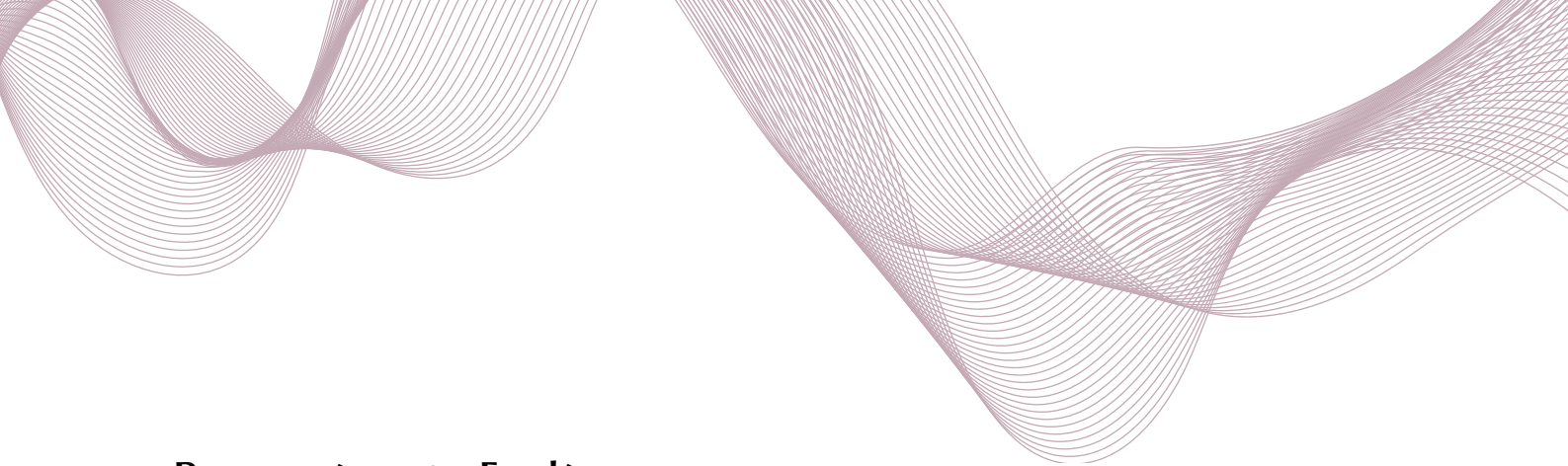
A manager from Ireland highlights the importance of training in building confidence, especially noting that women in professional settings might face greater hurdles in this area. This observation underscores the need for tailored training approaches that address diverse needs and promote inclusivity.

From **Greece**, a manager points out the difficulties in focusing on the individual problems faced by each employee and the challenges in transferring knowledge from more experienced staff to new hires in a remote environment. This reflects a broader issue where remote work limits the opportunities for organic, on-the-job learning and mentorship.

Additionally, a **Spanish** manager emphasizes the crucial role of leadership in training newly hired remote employees. The lack of physical presence in remote settings makes it challenging to provide comprehensive training and support, particularly for those just entering the workforce or the organization.

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Perception & Feeling

The challenge centers on how both managers and employees perceive training in a remote environment. There's a significant shift in the dynamics of training when it moves online, which can affect the confidence and comfort level of participants. As noted by the manager from Ireland, certain groups, like women, may face unique challenges in building confidence through remote training. This highlights the need for training approaches that are not only informative but also empowering and sensitive to the diverse needs of all employees.

Structure & Processes

Structurally, the challenge involves adapting training processes to the remote context. The Greek manager's observation about the difficulty in addressing individual employee needs and facilitating knowledge transfer underscores this. In a remote setting, traditional hands-on and observational learning methods are less viable. This necessitates the development of structured, yet flexible, training modules that can cater to a variety of learning styles and needs, ensuring that new employees receive the same level of training as they would in person.

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Leadership & Self-Leadership

From a leadership perspective, the challenge is twofold: ensuring that leaders themselves are equipped to train remotely and that they can effectively guide their teams through this new training format. As the Spanish manager pointed out, there is a strong need for leaders who can adeptly train remote employees. This requires managers to not only be knowledgeable in their field but also skilled in remote communication and engagement techniques to ensure effective training delivery.

Culture & Norms

Culturally, the challenge involves creating an environment that supports and values continuous learning and development, even when physically apart. This includes fostering a culture where asking questions and seeking help is encouraged and where employees feel supported in their learning journey. In a remote setting, establishing such a culture requires deliberate effort to ensure that all team members, regardless of location or background, have equal access to training opportunities and feel included in the learning process.

COMPLIANCE AND REGULATIONS

A Swedish participant highlighted the challenge of meeting the requirements of workplace safety laws when employees work remotely. This point stands out because it can be a challenge to tie legal obligations to the remote work dynamic.

In the contemporary landscape of remote work, a critical and often complex challenge for managers is ensuring compliance with workplace regulations and laws. This issue becomes particularly intricate when traditional workplace safety laws and organizational policies are applied to remote work settings. As highlighted by a participant from Sweden, the task of aligning legal obligations with the dynamics of remote work poses unique challenges for organizations.

The essence of this challenge lies in adapting and interpreting existing regulations, which are often designed for conventional office environments, to the diverse and individualized settings of remote work. Managers must navigate the legal intricacies of ensuring workplace safety and compliance when the 'workplace' extends to an employee's home or other remote locations. This involves not only understanding the legal requirements but also creatively applying them in a way that respects the flexibility and autonomy of remote work while maintaining legal integrity.

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Furthermore, the challenge extends beyond mere compliance. It involves developing a comprehensive understanding of how these regulations impact the well-being and safety of remote employees. Managers are tasked with the responsibility of implementing policies and practices that not only meet legal standards but also genuinely support the health and safety of their team members in a remote setting.

Perception & Feeling

From the perspective of perception and feeling, the challenge involves how both managers and employees view compliance and regulatory requirements in a remote setting. There can be a sense of ambiguity or confusion about how workplace safety laws apply when working from home. For instance, employees might feel uncertain about their rights and responsibilities, while managers may be concerned about the extent of their obligations to ensure a safe remote work environment. This can lead to anxiety about potential legal risks or feelings of being overwhelmed by the complexity of adapting regulations to a home setting.

Structure & Processes

Structurally, the challenge lies in establishing clear and effective processes to ensure compliance with workplace regulations in remote settings. Traditional workplace safety laws are often not designed with remote work in mind, leading to a gap in how these laws are applied and enforced. This requires organizations to develop new guidelines and procedures that are applicable to remote work environments. For example, creating policies for ergonomic home office setups or ensuring data security protocols are followed outside the traditional office.
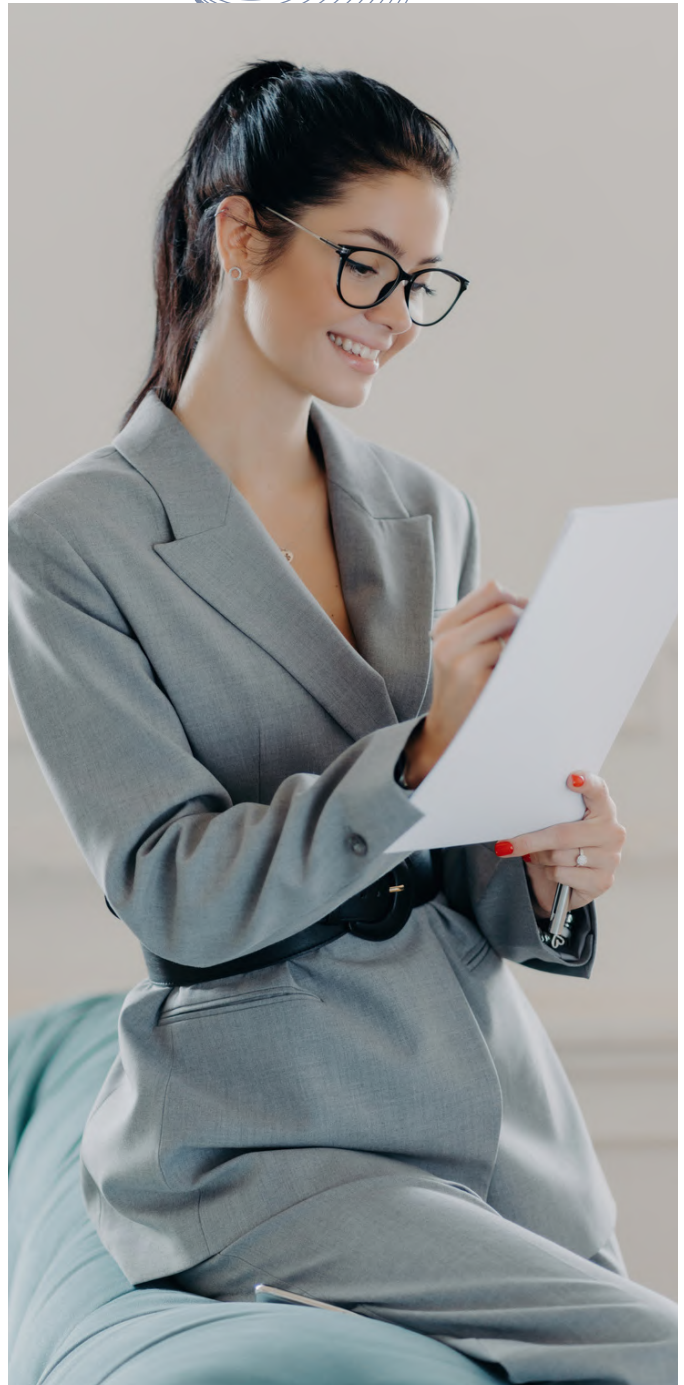
Leadership & Self-Leadership

From a leadership standpoint, the challenge is in guiding teams through these regulatory landscapes and ensuring compliance without direct oversight. Leaders must be well-informed about relevant laws and regulations and communicate these effectively to their team. This also involves self-leadership, where managers need to take the initiative to stay updated on legal changes and proactively implement compliance strategies in their remote teams.

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Culture & Norms

Culturally, the challenge involves creating a work culture that values and prioritizes compliance and safety, even in a remote setting. This includes promoting a culture where legal and safety guidelines are respected and integrated into daily work routines. Managers play a key role in fostering this culture by setting expectations, providing necessary training, and leading by example in terms of compliance and ethical behavior.
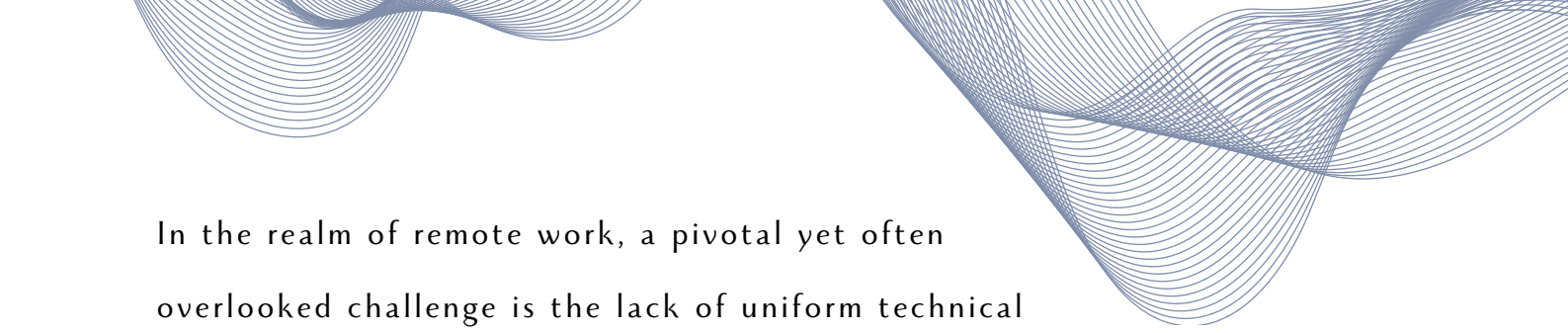
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LACK OF TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

> " A particular challenge with remote work is the potential inequality in home working conditions. Not all employees have access to an ideal workspace at home, which can influence their productivity and well-being.

-Manager, Sweden

In the realm of remote work, a pivotal yet often overlooked challenge is the lack of uniform technical infrastructure among employees. This issue, brought into sharp focus by the shift to home-based work, underscores the disparity in working conditions that can significantly impact employee productivity and well-being. As noted by a manager from Sweden, not all employees have the luxury of an ideal workspace at home, leading to a potential inequality that can affect their work experience and output.

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In the realm of remote work, a pivotal yet often overlooked challenge is the lack of uniform technical infrastructure among employees. This issue, brought into sharp focus by the shift to home-based work, underscores the disparity in working conditions that can significantly impact employee productivity and well-being. As noted by a manager from Sweden, not all employees have the luxury of an ideal workspace at home, leading to a potential inequality that can affect their work experience and output.

The challenge extends beyond just the physical workspace; it encompasses access to reliable internet, adequate hardware and software, and other technological resources that are essential for effective remote work. This inequality in technical infrastructure can create a divide within the workforce, where some employees are better equipped for remote work than others. Such disparities can lead to frustration, reduced morale, and even hinder collaboration within teams.

Managers are thus faced with the task of identifying and addressing these variances in technical readiness among their team members. This involves not only recognizing the physical limitations of home workspaces but also understanding the technological needs and challenges that different employees face. Ensuring equitable access to the necessary tools and resources is crucial for maintaining productivity, promoting fairness, and supporting the overall well-being of remote workers.

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Perception & Feeling

Through this lens, the challenge involves understanding how disparities in technical infrastructure impact employees' feelings and perceptions. Employees lacking adequate workspaces or technology may feel disadvantaged and stressed, affecting their morale and engagement. For example, an employee with poor internet connectivity might feel frustrated and isolated, unable to participate effectively in virtual meetings, leading to feelings of exclusion and reduced job satisfaction.

Structure & Processes

From this perspective, the focus is on the organizational structures and processes that can either mitigate or exacerbate disparities in technical infrastructure. The challenge lies in creating systems that ensure equitable access to necessary technological resources. For instance, a lack of standardized equipment provision or support for home office setups can lead to significant productivity differences among employees, highlighting the need for well-defined processes to address these infrastructure gaps.

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Leadership & Self-Leadership

Here, the challenge is for managers to lead with an understanding of the diverse technical needs of their remote teams. Effective leadership in this context involves proactively identifying and addressing the technological challenges faced by team members. It also requires self-awareness from managers in recognizing their own potential biases towards employees with different levels of technical accessibility. Leaders must advocate for and facilitate the provision of necessary resources to ensure all team members can work effectively.

Culture & Norms

From a cultural perspective, the challenge involves creating an inclusive work culture that acknowledges and addresses disparities in technical infrastructure. Managers need to foster a culture where employees feel comfortable sharing their technological challenges without fear of judgment or professional repercussions. This includes recognizing the varying home working conditions and promoting norms that support flexibility and understanding towards those who may be technologically disadvantaged.

DISCUSSION

Let us look once more at the **key 15 challenges** that managers and leaders frequently face whilst managing a remote team. Our aim is that this study and report has created a deeper understanding of each.

- Difficulty establishing personal connections.

- Creating and assimilating organizational culture.

- Difficulties in fostering team cohesion.

- Poor communication and insufficient feedback.

- Mental and emotional strain.

- Low employee motivation.

- Variances in cultural and individual backgrounds.

- Issues with trust, either insufficient or misused.

- Distractions.

- Limited managerial control.

- Work-life balance

- Lack of competencies.

- Inability to provide adequate training.

- Compliance and regulations.
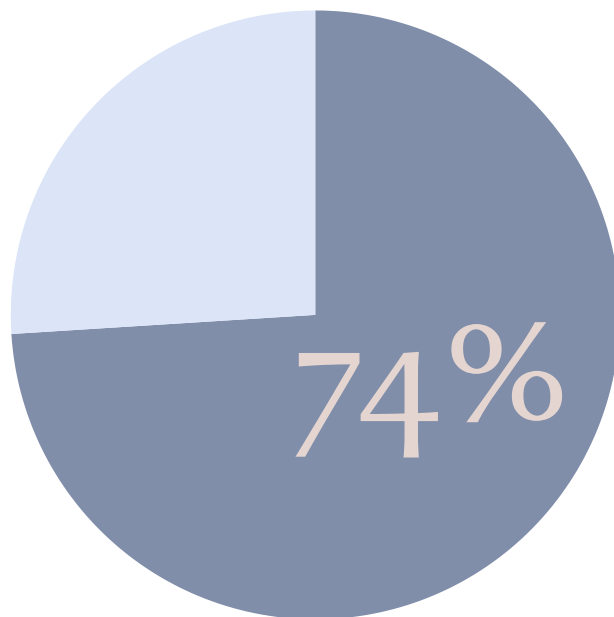
- Lack of technical infrastructure.

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As you will have seen from this report, behind each of these challenges, there are managers and leaders, trying to find a harmonious way to exist,thrive and lead in this new working environment and to avoid burnout. Through this study, we aimed to explore each of these challenges through different lenses to create a comprehensive, interesting, informative, and enhanced understanding of the multifaceted challenges encountered by managers in the remote working environment.

> We recommend taking some time and choosing the challenges above that you find the most challenging and going back over them and using this report as a tool to create awareness and understanding.

The report reveals notable differences in how managers from various countries perceive and address these challenges. The shift to remote work presents a spectrum of challenges that require multifaceted solutions. By understanding these five dimensions and implementing targeted strategies, organizations can foster a more productive, inclusive, and supportive remote work environment.

In our comprehensive study on burnout from a managerial perspective, it becomes evident that this is a significant and widespread issue in the modern workplace.

A majority of managers interviewed (74%) reported experiencing burnout within their teams, attributing it primarily to the demanding nature of their professions. This report summarizes the key findings from these interviews and focus group discussions, offering insights into how managers perceive, experience, and address burnout in their teams.

74%

Managers noted that certain professions are inherently more prone to burnout, leading to consequences like high staff turnover. This observation underscores the profession-specific risks associated with burnout and the challenges it poses to organizational stability.

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PREVENTIVE MEASURES AND STRATEGIES

The study also revealed several strategies to address and prevent burnout that will be the foundation of our next step in the project. Managers emphasized acknowledging burnout, confiding in trusted colleagues, practicing self-care, making lifestyle adjustments, and seeking professional help when necessary. Effective preventive measures included setting realistic work expectations, delegating tasks appropriately, taking regular breaks, and learning to say no.

In Ireland, a proactive approach was adopted where staff were required to utilize a significant portion of their annual leave by August, promoting rest and reducing stress. This policy underscores the importance of restorative breaks in preventing burnout.
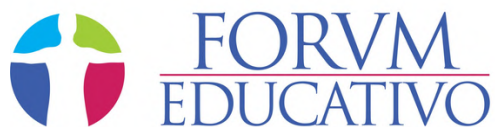
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COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic was mentioned as a significant factor that exacerbated mental health challenges, particularly affecting groups like working women. This has led to an increased focus on mental and psychological well-being in the workplace and has served as a catalyst for organizational changes aimed at addressing these issues.

IN CONCLUSION

The managerial perspectives on burnout reveal it as a multifaceted issue requiring a nuanced approach. The study highlights the need for proactive strategies, supportive work environments, and a culture that prioritizes mental health and work-life balance. The experiences shared by managers across various countries provide valuable insights into effective ways of recognizing, preventing, and managing burnout, emphasizing the pivotal role of leadership in fostering a healthy and sustainable work environment.

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