

Whitepaper

# Remote Leadership and the Lack of Feedback – Ideas for Action

Leading by #WePowerment



## Remote Leadership and the Lack of Feedback – Ideas for Action



### Remote leadership is the "new norm", but the necessary skills are lacking across the board

#### Why this whitepaper?

The Corona crisis has changed the world fundamentally. The pandemic has been preoccupying us for almost a year now and has turned the way we work together in organizations upside down.

Based on a survey by HRDigital, this whitepaper presents specific recommendations for the improvement of virtual work and virtual leadership in your company by using an IT solution that Kienbaum, as a cooperation partner, is responsible for implementing.

Two key findings from the study:

- **Leaders do not yet meet the new expectations of remote leadership.**
- **There are not yet sufficient support offerings for the development of remote leadership skills.**

As a basis for further development of leaders in times of digital working, this whitepaper introduces the "Remote Leadership" model developed by HRDigital.

#### **The Corona crisis has given the world of work a digital push**

Whereas remote work occurred only as a marginal activity in many organizations prior to Corona, many people take it for granted to work from home today.

It is gratifying that a large proportion of the workforce has a positive attitude towards the increasing digitization of the workplace. A recent study by DAK-Gesundheit, a German health insurance provider, conducted before and during the Corona pandemic with more than 6,000 respondents, shows that one in two feels that increasing digitization is a relief. The group of those who feel that digitization is a burden shrank by 80% compared to the period before the pandemic.



# The majority of remote workers say they work more productively at home

The respondents see a major advantage in the newly gained flexibility, which is, for example, a better work-life balance and the ability to better distribute work throughout the day. According to their own statements, the majority of those surveyed work more productively at home (59%) (source: <https://www.dak.de/dak/bundesthemen/sonderanalyse-2295276.html#/>).

## Increasing challenges for leaders

However, in addition to the new opportunities offered by remote working, there are also numerous challenges.

Expectations of leadership and collaboration have not only changed for the time "during Corona", but will remain the same for the time after the Corona crisis.

Numerous studies show that employees do not want to give up their newly gained flexibility and want to work more remotely in the future.

However, a major danger of virtual work is that employees increasingly lose touch with the team and feel less and less a part of the company.

**For example, 75% of those surveyed in the above-mentioned DAK study stated that they missed interaction with their teams, especially informal, personal exchange.**

Whereas there were numerous meeting places for exchanging ideas with colleagues before the Corona pandemic and people could meet spontaneously at the coffee machine, in the canteen or even in the hallway, interaction is currently limited to telephone and video conferences.

The lack of opportunities for interpersonal, physical contact leads in part to an increase in social isolation and a decrease in the emotional connection with the employer.

Every year, the Gallup study surveys the so-called Engagement Index, which stands for employee motivation and retention.

According to this index, in 2019 only 15% of employees in Europe felt an emotional connection to their employer. The majority of those surveyed, around 70%, on the other hand, do "service by the book".

About 16% of employees have already quit their jobs mentally.

It is assumed that this demotivation, which goes hand in hand with unproductivity, corresponds to an economic loss of about 100 billion euros per year.

It remains to be seen how these figures will develop during the Corona crisis. (source: <https://www.personalwirtschaft.de/fuehrung/artikel/deutsche-arbeitnehmer-bemaengeln-fehlende-unterstuetzung-bei-digitaler-weiterbildung.html>).

## Virtual work requires a new intensity of leadership

### People-related challenges

#### Lack of...

- ...psychological safety
- ...social and emotional interaction
- ...sense of belonging
- ...on-the-job development, peer coaching

**Building trust and stabilizing relationships**

### Remote Leadership

### Task-related challenges

#### Lack of...

- ...information
- ...ad-hoc support
- ...control
- ...focus and structure

**Maintaining productivity and ensuring results**

Figure 1: Challenges of remote leadership



# The number of reported mental illnesses has currently risen by 80% - how should leaders deal with this remotely?

It is clear that leaders currently have a particularly important role to play. They are responsible for providing their virtual teams with security, orientation and support in an uncertain time, and for ensuring profitability.

**At the same time, companies should not underestimate how stressful this crisis can be for many employees.**

Fears of job loss, the long-term effects of the virus or increasing restrictions in everyday life have led to the commercial health insurance companies reporting a significant increase in mental illness among employees in their August 2020 study.

According to the study, the number of reported mental illnesses, e.g. depression, has increased by 80% compared to the previous year (source: <https://www.kkh.de/presse/pressemeldungen/krankenstand-corona>).

## Changed framework conditions and new competences

Moreover, in times of virtual work, things that we previously took for granted are suddenly missing. Leaders are now more than ever required to adapt to the new framework conditions and to create a motivating work environment for their teams in which good work results are achieved.

Based on the changed conditions that arise for leaders in the age of virtual work, HRDigital has developed a competence model for virtual leadership (see page 4).

**It summarizes the new requirements for leaders in six leadership roles and corresponding observable behavior patterns.**

In a flash survey with more than 60 participants via the online network LinkedIn in September 2020, we wanted to find out how much Corona has changed our working world from the companies' point of view and how well leaders deal with these changes.



# Many leaders lack feedback from their employees on what they already handle well in distance management and what they should improve

## Virtual leadership is the new normal, but lacks regular feedback

The respondents agree: an impressive 83% agree that the Corona pandemic has massively changed the way companies work together.

Almost 80% of those surveyed agree that virtual leadership has been the rule, not the exception, since the beginning of the pandemic. It is interesting to note, however, that most companies have not yet established processes and structures for regular feedback to their leaders.

Thus, 87% of the respondents contradict the statement:

**"The leaders in my company receive regular feedback on their ability to lead virtually."**

In other words: many leaders do not know how well they are able to cope with the new situation from the perspective of their employees. They also lack information about what they are already doing particularly well and in which areas they could develop further.

## COVID-19 has massively changed leadership and collaboration

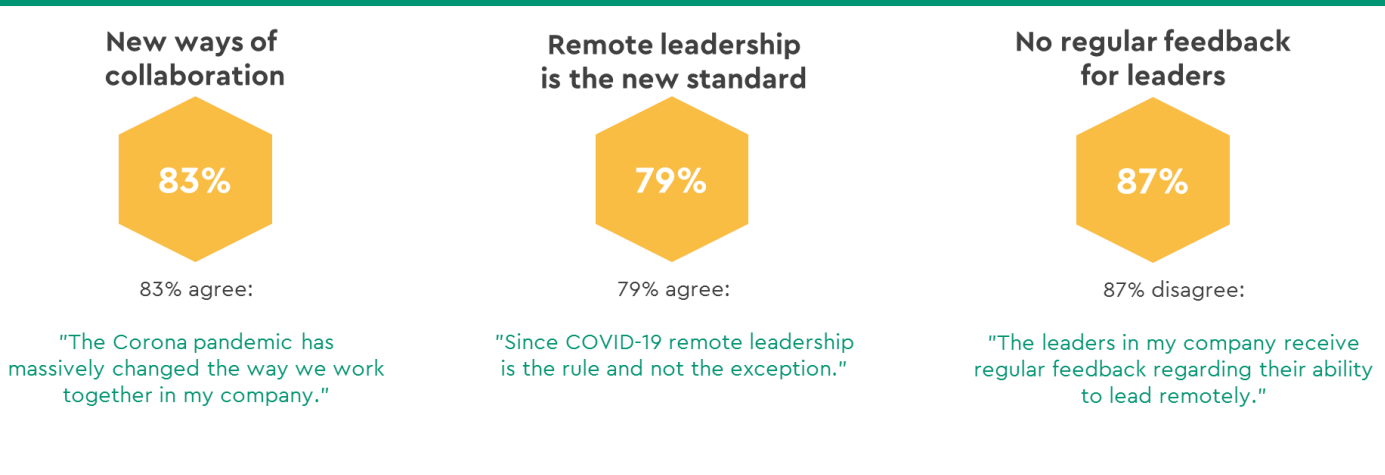


Figure 2: Changes in leadership and collaboration since COVID-19.



## Coaching skills for leaders in a virtual context still need to be upgraded

The most important role for virtual leadership, in the view of the respondents, is that of the "Chief of Engagement". In this role, the leader is responsible for motivating the virtual team and designing the working environment to maintain the team's commitment.

In comparison, the role of the "tech enthusiast" is rated as rather unimportant. This includes the task of encouraging the team to use virtual collaboration tools and to work with advanced tools themselves.

## The roles of the "pacemaker" and the "remote coach" are also considered important

However, while the respondents state that they regularly observe the corresponding "pacemaker" behaviors among their leaders, the role of the "remote coach" still displays the most potential of all leadership roles.

Only 8% of respondents agree that their company's leaders encourage other team members to coach each other, recognize their team for good performance, and actively listen and seek feedback.

## Very few leaders act as remote coaches

Ranking of leadership roles	Observable behaviors/ definition
Chief of Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourages team to stay motivated</li> <li>Creates a motivating work environment</li> </ul>
Pacemaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sets clear goals and structures for virtual collaboration</li> <li>Demonstrates trust by delegating decision making responsibility to the team</li> </ul>
Remote Coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourages team members to coach each other</li> <li>Gives appreciation to the team for good performance</li> <li>Listens actively and gives feedback regularly</li> </ul>
Networker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regularly gives updates to the team about what is happening in the company</li> <li>Connects the team with other departments in the organization</li> </ul>
Virtual Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows an honest interest in the satisfaction of the team</li> <li>Encourages team to express criticism openly</li> <li>Takes time for virtual team building to keep the motivation in the team alive</li> </ul>
Tech-Enthusiast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses advanced virtual collaboration tools</li> <li>Encourages the team to use virtual collaboration tools</li> </ul>

92% never observe these behaviors in their organization

Figure 3: Remote Leadership Model - Ranking of leadership roles by respondents



### Support formats for virtual leadership are scarce

According to 80% of the respondents in our flashlight survey, there are currently either no or only few education formats focusing specifically on remote leadership. Similarly, leaders generally receive too little feedback regarding their ability to lead virtually.

Among the respondents, a tendency that the offers increase with the size of the company can be observed: For example, companies with more than 1,000 employees offer special support services such as e-learnings or webinars as well as semi-annual or annual feedback for leaders more frequently than smaller companies. A clear trend can also be observed concerning the question what the top three challenges of companies are in terms of virtual leadership.

### The topic "(lack of) trust" can be identified as the biggest challenge

This factor probably prevented many leaders from offering remote work to their employees across the board before the Corona pandemic.

In second place is the topic "team spirit & team building". It seems to be more difficult for many leaders to maintain a good mood and perceptible cohesion in the team in virtual settings.

## Trust is the greatest challenge for leaders



Figure 4: Biggest challenges for leaders with regards to leading remotely



# Collaboration is currently being digitalized rapidly and permanently - companies are cancelling leases for central areas

The third place is shared by three topics with approximately the same number of responses: Lack of tools or poor IT, creating emotional closeness and lack of feedback.

The topics "emotional closeness" and "missing feedback" go hand in hand with the realization that the role of the "remote coach" is currently still insufficiently filled by leaders.

**Not surprising is the fact that technical requirements in companies are not yet sufficient to enable successful remote leadership.**

The question which measure would have the greatest possible effect on remote leadership success is most frequently answered with "feedback". Topics that are also frequently mentioned are "improving IT or increasing bandwidth", "training to build emotional closeness" and "virtual events with external input".

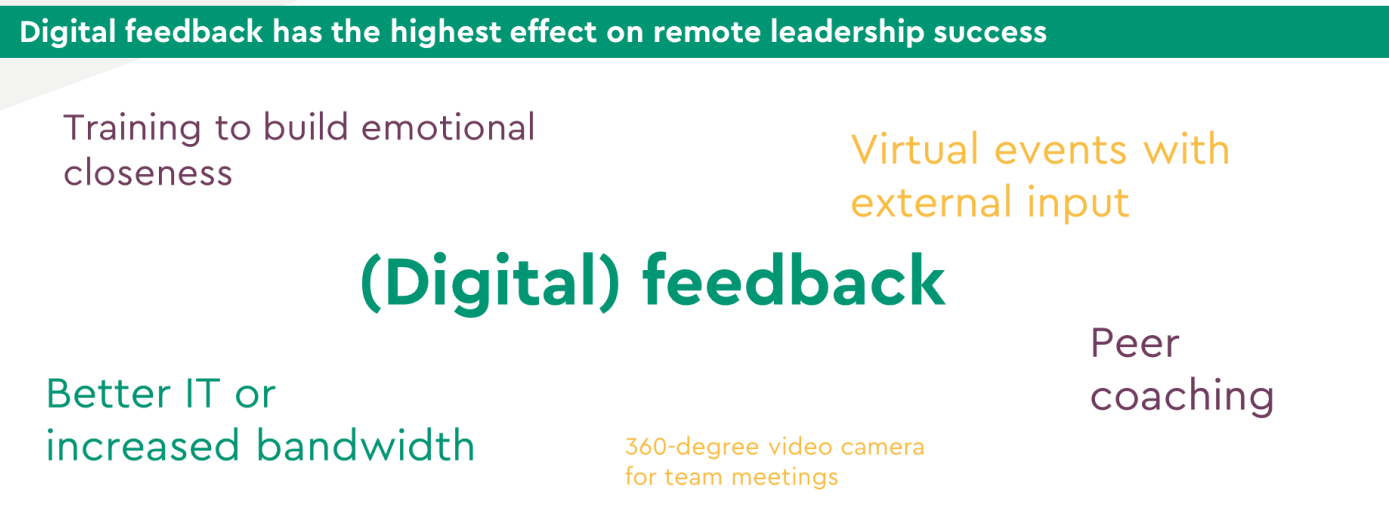


Figure 5: Measure with the greatest effect on improving remote leadership from the respondents' perspectives



## Remote leadership is crucial for corporate success

The Corona crisis has given a boost to digitization in many areas of companies. At the same time, most companies have not yet created the necessary framework for successful virtual work. Leaders need support to meet the increased demands of remote leadership.

80% of those surveyed agree with the statement "The ability to lead remotely will be the most important criterion for leadership success in the next 1-2 years". In the future, corporate success will largely depend on whether leaders manage to motivate their virtual teams by creating emotional closeness and a sense of belonging.

For many leaders this will be a difficult task, as it is not only a matter of building up competencies, but also of changing attitudes and behaviors.

## Surround-View is a software solution that helps to master the challenges of remote leadership

Our study shows that feedback is more important than ever in the digital age. With the cloud-based people-centricity platform Surround-View, HRDigital helps companies to regularly collect feedback from employees and leaders and to systematically use it for personnel development.



## Self-assessment: Is your current organization up for the challenges of remote leadership?



1

Is your company technically well prepared for remote work, e.g. with mobile devices and collaboration tools?

Absolutely

☐

Partially

☐

Not at all

☐

2

Does your company have clearly defined requirements for leaders who manage their teams remotely, e.g. requirement profiles, regular performance reviews or a competence model?

☐☐☐

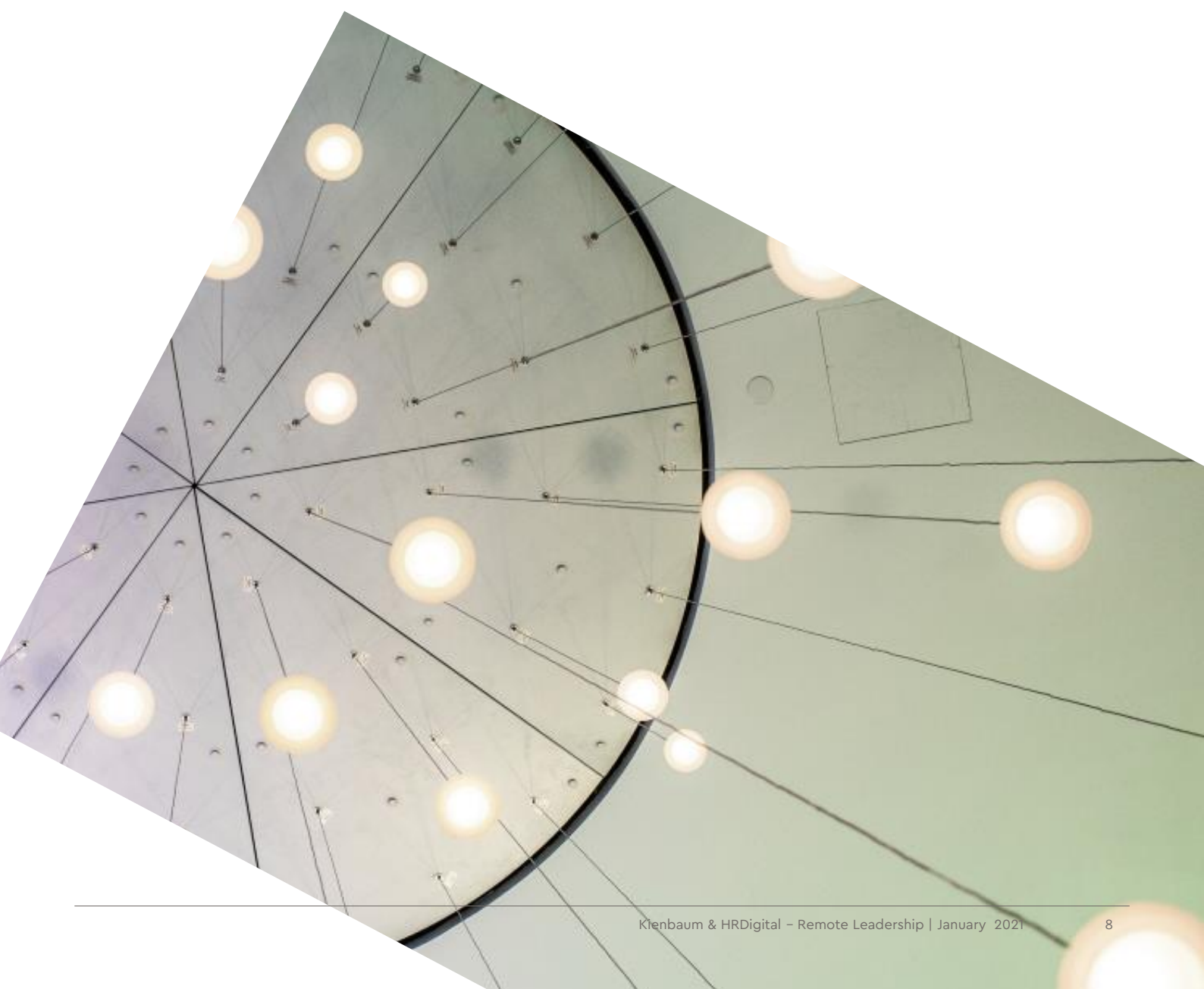
3

Do leaders in your company receive regular feedback on how well they manage their teams remotely?

☐☐☐

4

Does your company offer support for leaders, e.g. training or coaching offers for remote leadership?

☐☐☐



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## About the cooperation between Kienbaum and HRDigital:

Try Surround-View from HRDigital non-bindingly and use the "Remote Leadership" model for 360-degree feedback from your managers. Jumana Klotsch will be happy to help you.

Kienbaum is available to you as an implementation partner for the use of Surround-View in your specific projects. Please feel free to contact Inge Baurmann.

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