PLAUSIBILITY STUDY

WHAT SOME PEOPLE CLAIMED TO BE "IMPOSSIBLE" - NAMELY REMOTE WORKING - SUDDENLY

HAPPENED AND IS NOW A KEY COMPONENT OF FUTURE WORK AND BUSINESS OPERATIONS.

BUT NOW, THERE IS A GROWING REALISATION THAT JUST PROVIDING COMMUNICATION

TECHNOLOGY AND TRAINING FOR MANAGING VIRTUAL TEAMS, IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH AND

PROBLEMS WITH MOTIVATION, PERFORMANCE AND TRUST ARE MANIFEST.

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The problems caused by hybrid working can no longer be ignored and if organisations are serious about offering a real alternative to face-to-face, HR leaders need to step up and take the lead. HR has an essential strategic role to play in the transformation towards hybrid work for two key reasons. Firstly, compared with face-to-face, hybrid and virtual collaboration belong to a different paradigm of communication, with its own idiosyncrasies. There is a need for new competences, new skills and a new mindset throughout the whole organisation. Secondly, CEOs and HR need to lead the use of technology, instead of being led by it and set the strategic agenda for a new culture of collaboration and leadership.

Organisations tend to train managers and leaders in virtual leadership, but not their boards or executive teams. Those who have been trained start to implement new ways of collaborating virtually, but become frustrated when executives join meetings and simply transfer what works best for them from their face-to-face practice into the virtual space. This often remains unrecognised because challenging upwards can feel daunting. However, since virtual collaboration and leadership belong to a different paradigm, learning needs to take place in particular at the top of an organisation. HR has an important role to play in helping executives realise their need to unlearn and learn anew.

Work is now more of an activity that happens between networks of people. New criteria for working hours and availability need to be defined within the company. Clear new boundaries need to be established so that the right balance can be achieved between private life and work. For this, there is no generic recipe. The process of redefining these boundaries collaboratively has exactly as much value as the outcomes themselves, because it will foster a mindset shift and shape a new leadership culture. HR should facilitate it. Performance

management needs more than ever to be led by objectives on the basis of robust coaching and systematic feedback. The more remote the employees, the more they want to be seen and acknowledged for their performance. Relationships now belong to the executive strategic agenda alongside business strategy. Leaders and managers need to move closer to their employees virtually and to understand them as people, not as task performers.

Executives need to understand their new role as 'communications designers'. They do not need to be IT experts, but they do need to understand how communication technology is shaping collaboration and leadership behaviours. Most leave the choice of communication platforms to their IT-department. Little effort is made to really understand how platforms and features impact on the collaboration and leadership culture. For example, the common practice of muting people leads to passive behaviours among employees. In the worst case, it cuts them off from their power to speak up. In the best case, it just creates ping-pong conversations. With hybrid working, new behaviours shaped by the technology, have started to become new norms with unintended consequences. Leaders should lead the use of technology and not let themselves be led by it and that requires deep reflection about computer mediated interaction. HR cannot simply let these new behaviours of collaboration emerge hoping that they will be good enough.

FOR FURTHER INFO

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