

Introducing New Modes of Organizational Collaboration: A Change Management Perspective

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Abstract

This publication deals with the specific challenges that can arise when introducing remote and hybrid working conditions in companies. A comparison is made with the implementation of agile management methods, which were investigated accordingly within the framework of an empirical-qualitative study. In the context of the examination of the state of research, the problems that arise both in the implementation and the actual use of hybrid and remote working methods are presented. Agile leadership is described here on the one hand as a potential solution to communicative problems and on the other hand it is shown how the introduction of such a leadership approach coincides with that of remote and hybrid leadership with regard to its problem specifics and potential solutions. A series of recommendations for managers is derived, which should enable them to successfully manage the war for talent in a working environment characterised by hybrid working methods.

Keywords: remote, hybrid, agile, leadership, modes, work

Introduction

Remote and Hybrid Work – Challenges for Corporations and Employees Alike

Remote and hybrid work have gained substantial momentum in recent years, driven by factors such as technological advancements, globalization, and shifts in the modern workforce's preferences (Ozimek, 2020; Yang et al., 2022; Alexander, De Smet, Langstaff & Ravid, 2021). The pandemic served as an accelerant for these trends, forcing organizations to quickly adapt to remote work as a survival strategy (Arunprasad et al., 2021; Galanti, Guidetti, Mazzei, Zappala & Toscano, 2021). Consequently, remote and hybrid work models have now become integral aspects of the evolving business landscape.

These modes of collaboration, though advantageous in terms of flexibility and cost savings, present unique challenges for leaders and employees alike (Fayard, Weeks &

Khan, 2021). Traditional leadership practices, based on in-person interactions and hierarchical structures, must be reevaluated to ensure their effectiveness in remote and hybrid contexts (Hilberath et al., 2020; Oleksa-Marewska & Tokar, 2022). Furthermore, these new work arrangements demand an adaptation of communication, collaboration, and decision-making processes to accommodate geographically dispersed team members (Pullan, 2022).

For employees, remote and hybrid work can be a double-edged sword, recent research shows. While these arrangements provide greater autonomy and work-life balance, they may also result in feelings of isolation, detachment from organizational culture, and difficulty in establishing meaningful relationships with colleagues (Terry, 2022; Sewell & Taskin, 2015). In addition, employees may face challenges in managing time and setting boundaries between work and personal life, increasing the potential for burnout (Charalampous et al., 2019).

Agile leadership, characterized by a flexible and adaptive approach, has emerged as a promising solution to the challenges posed by remote and hybrid work (Comella-Dorda, Garg, Thareja & Vasquez-McCall, 2020; Steude, 2021; Rehberg, Danoesastro, Kaul & Stutts, 2020). By embracing the principles of agility, leaders can effectively navigate the complexities of remote and hybrid work, empowering their teams to thrive in these environments (Hayward, 2021).

Moreover, analyzing the dynamics of agile leadership within remote and hybrid work environments can contribute to the broader discourse on leadership theory and practice (Hayward, 2021). By exploring the interplay between leadership styles, organizational culture, and various modes of collaboration, researchers can enhance the field's overall understanding of the factors that contribute to effective leadership in an increasingly interconnected and flexible world.

Why Employees Matter – Retention and Engagement

The "War for Talent," a term coined in the 1990s, highlights the increasing competition among organizations and leaders to attract and retain top talent (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin & Michaels III, 1998; Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Brown & Tannock, 2009). As the global economy becomes increasingly knowledge-driven, the importance of a skilled and engaged workforce has never been more evident (Glen, 2006).

Employee motivation, a central aspect of organizational success, refers to the forces that drive individuals to perform tasks and achieve goals (Ramlall, 2004; Ganta, 2014). Motivation can stem from various sources, such as intrinsic factors like personal growth, self-efficacy, and mastery (Ayundasari, Sudiro & Irawanto, 2017), or extrinsic factors like monetary rewards, recognition, and promotions (Naile & Selesho, 2014; Webb, 2007). A motivated workforce is more likely to be innovative, productive, and committed to the organization's mission and vision, making it a

critical factor in the War for Talent (Fairbank & Williams, 2001; Cadwallader, Jarvis, Bitner & Ostrom, 2010).

Employee engagement, another crucial component, is the extent to which employees feel emotionally (and, according to other models of engagement, factually) invested in their work and the organization as a whole (Meyer, 2014; Thomas, 2009; Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2015). Engaged employees tend to display high levels of enthusiasm, dedication, and ownership of their tasks and responsibilities. This results in increased productivity, reduced turnover, and a greater likelihood of achieving organizational objectives (Vafin, 2021).

As remote and hybrid work models become more prevalent, maintaining employee motivation and engagement becomes an increasingly complex challenge. Traditional motivators, such as face-to-face recognition and team-based incentives, may lose effectiveness in remote or hybrid contexts. Moreover, employees working in geographically dispersed teams may experience feelings of isolation and detachment, which can undermine motivation and engagement (Lartey & Randall, 2021; 2022; Kral, Janoskova & Dawson, 2022).

Agile leadership plays a pivotal role in cultivating employee motivation and engagement within remote and hybrid work environments (Comella-Dorda et al., 2020; Reunamäli & Fey, 2022). Agile leaders tend to prioritize open communication, feedback, and continuous learning, enabling them to support employees in overcoming challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities presented by remote and hybrid work arrangements (Comella-Dorda et al., 2020; Stone, Horan & Flaxman, 2018).

Furthermore, agile leaders foster a culture of trust and empowerment, providing employees with the autonomy needed to thrive in remote and hybrid work settings. By delegating decision-making authority and encouraging innovation, agile leaders enable employees to take ownership of their work, enhancing motivation and engagement (Akkaya & Bagienska, 2022). This alignment between leadership style and the unique demands of remote and hybrid work contributes significantly to an organization's ability to attract and retain top talent in a competitive landscape, with authors such as Pontillo, Di Lauro and Antonelli (2022) claiming, that trust is also among the most crucial aspects of remote-based leadership.

Research Gap and Research Agenda

The rapid and widespread shift to remote and hybrid work environments due to the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for organizations to adapt their leadership approaches to effectively manage distributed teams. While there has been extensive research on remote work and leadership in recent years, a research gap exists in understanding the specific challenges leaders face when introducing remote or hybrid work models, particularly in the context of transitioning from a predominantly remote work environment to a hybrid one.

The experiences and lessons learned from the introduction of agile leadership can provide valuable insights into the challenges leaders may face when implementing remote and hybrid work models. Agile leadership emphasizes adaptability, collaboration, and continuous improvement, which are essential qualities for managing distributed teams in remote or hybrid work environments.

By examining the experiences of leaders who have introduced agile leadership principles, we can draw parallels and identify common challenges they face, such as resistance to change, communication barriers, and the need for effective change management strategies. These insights can help inform our understanding of the challenges associated with introducing remote and hybrid work and provide guidance for leaders who are navigating this transition.

Using a study on the introduction of agile leadership as a foundation for our investigation allows us to leverage the existing knowledge, experiences, and lessons learned from these leaders to better understand and address the unique challenges that arise when introducing remote and hybrid work models. By focusing on the parallels between the introduction of agile leadership and remote or hybrid work, we aim to contribute valuable insights to the current body of research and support organizations in their ongoing efforts to adapt to the changing work landscape.

The following research question is used to develop this study:

Which particular challenges do leaders face when introducing remote or hybrid work and which lessons therefore can be drawn from the findings regarding the introduction of agile leadership.

This seems crucial, as Schmidtner, Doering & Timinger (2021) also explain, that agile leadership approaches seem to be an especially good fit for remote work, as the particular challenges of this working environment are addressed by the specifics of agile leadership, as the present article aims to showcase.

The Role of Leaders in Remote and Hybrid Environments

Remote and Hybrid – Viewed through the Perspective of Change Management

As organizations transition from traditional office settings to remote and hybrid work environments, they inevitably face the complexities and challenges associated with corporate change (Howard-Grenville, 2020; Parker, Knight & Keller, 2020). This shift has been accelerated by the pandemic, forcing many organizations to adapt rapidly to new ways of working (Waizenegger, McKenna, Cai & Bendz, 2020; Waizenegger, Thalmann, Sarigianni, Eckhardt, Kolb, Maier & Remus, 2016; Arunprasad et al., 2022).

One key concept in change management is the recognition of the human side of change (Dievernich, 2015; Dempsey, Geitner, Brennan & McAvoy, 2021). Employees may experience a wide range of emotions, including fear, anxiety, and resistance, when faced with the prospect of transitioning to remote or hybrid work arrangements, Rafferty and Minbashian (2019) explain with an overall gaze towards

the emotional aspects of change management. It is vital for leaders to acknowledge these emotions and provide support to employees as they navigate the changes (Nyberg, Shaw & Zhu, 2021). By adopting an empathetic and supportive approach, leaders can help employees feel heard and valued, ultimately fostering a more positive attitude towards the change (Sements-Orlova et al., 2021).

Another crucial aspect of change management is effective communication. Clear and consistent communication is essential when introducing remote or hybrid work models, as it helps to minimize confusion and uncertainty among employees (Shulga, 2021; Cameron & Green, 2019). Agile leaders can leverage communication channels to share the rationale behind the change, the benefits and challenges associated with remote and hybrid work, and the expectations for employees in the new work environment (Kamal et al., 2020; Marek, Winska & Dabrowski, 2021; Schmidtner, Doering & Timinger, 2021).

In the context of remote and hybrid work, organizations must also consider the need for new competencies and skills (Flores, 2019). The transition from traditional office settings may require employees to develop proficiency in digital tools, virtual collaboration, and remote project management, as Esteban-Navarro et al. (2020) summarize under the term *digital divide*. To address these needs, organizations can invest in training and development programs aimed at enhancing employees' capabilities in these areas (Yarberry & Sims, 2021; De Vincenzi et al., 2022).

Another relevant concept from change management is the role of leadership in driving and sustaining change (Zainol, Kowang, Hee, Fei & Kadir, 2021; Lundmark, Richter & Tafvelin, 2022; Spagnoli et al., 2020). Agile leaders, with their adaptable and collaborative approach, are well-suited to spearhead the transition to remote and hybrid work. By exemplifying the desired behaviors, setting clear expectations, and providing ongoing support, agile leaders can shape an organizational environment that encourages employees to embrace the change and contribute to the organization's success (Pontillo, Di Lauro & Antonelli, 2022).

Organizational culture, a central aspect of change management, also plays a significant role in the transition to remote and hybrid work (Cornella-Dorda et al., 2020; Howard-Greenville, 2020). A strong organizational culture that promotes trust, flexibility, and adaptability can serve as a foundation for the successful implementation of remote and hybrid work models (Taborosi et al., 2020; Sanchez, 2022).

Change management also underscores the importance of adaptability and flexibility. As organizations navigate the complexities of remote and hybrid work, they may need to revisit their strategies and make adjustments based on feedback, lessons learned, and emerging best practices (Jivan, Marnewick & Joseph, 2020; Holbeche, 2019).

Transitioning from a remote work environment, which was primarily induced by the COVID-19 pandemic (Waizenegger et al., 2020), to a hybrid work model can present

several challenges for both employees and organizations (Alexander, De Smet, Langstaff & Ravid, 2021). One of the main challenges lies in the potential resistance from employees who have grown accustomed to the freedom and flexibility offered by remote work (Williamson & Colley, 2022; Adams, 2020).

Research shows, employees who have successfully adapted to remote work may feel reluctant to return to the office, even on a part-time basis (Bloom, Han & Liang, 2022; Gratton, 2021; Babapour Chafi, Hultberg & Boziz Yams, 2022). They may be concerned about the potential impact on their productivity or the need to readjust their daily routines. Additionally, employees might worry about health and safety in the office environment, particularly if the pandemic situation is still uncertain. This apprehension can result in resistance to the transition and affect employees' morale and engagement.

Hybrid work environments, where some employees work on-site while others continue to work remotely, can present unique communication challenges. The mix of remote and on-site employees can lead to discrepancies in access to information, resources, and opportunities for collaboration (Wontorczyk & Roźnowski, 2022). This situation can inadvertently create communication silos and bubbles, where remote employees might feel disconnected from their on-site counterparts. On the other hand, on-site employees might develop a closer bond with their on-site colleagues, which could unintentionally exclude remote team members from essential discussions and decision-making processes (Franken et al., 2021).

Leaders and their Role in Organizational Change

Organizational change is an inevitable and constant aspect of business in today's dynamic environment. Leaders play a pivotal role in the process, guiding their teams and organizations through the various stages of change (Abbas & Asghar, 2010). Their influence encompasses multiple dimensions, including strategic direction, communication, resource allocation, and culture development. By successfully navigating these domains, leaders can foster a smooth and effective transition, ultimately resulting in a more resilient and adaptive organization. (SEO et al., 2012).

Driving change as a leader involves identifying the drivers of change, such as market shifts or technological advancements, and articulating the benefits and opportunities that the change will bring. By setting clear objectives and aligning them with the organization's mission and values, leaders can provide a sense of direction and purpose for their teams during uncertain times (Jabbar & Hussein, 2017).

Communication is another crucial aspect of leading organizational change. Transparent, timely, and empathetic communication helps to build trust and create a sense of psychological safety, which is essential for employees to voice their concerns and ideas (Men, 2014). Leaders must also create channels for feedback and dialogue, ensuring that they remain attuned to the needs and perspectives of their teams. This

feedback loop allows leaders to make necessary adjustments to the change process, enhancing its overall effectiveness (Baker, Perreault, Reid & Blanchard, 2013).

Resource allocation and culture development further underscore the importance of leadership in organizational change. By allocating the necessary resources – including time, financial support, and training – leaders can empower their teams to adapt to new conditions and drive performance (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Additionally, leaders are instrumental in shaping the organization's culture, instilling values and behaviors that promote agility, collaboration, and innovation (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000).

The shift from traditional office settings to remote and hybrid work models is a prominent example of organizational change that requires adept leadership. The transition to remote work challenges leaders to rethink their approaches to communication, collaboration, and performance management (Spagnoli, Manuti, Buono & Ghislieri, 2021). In this context, the role of a leader extends to fostering a sense of connection and belonging among team members, despite the physical distance (Sull, Sull & Bersin, 2020).

Adopting a hybrid work model, which combines aspects of both remote and in-person work, adds another layer of complexity to organizational change. Leaders must carefully balance the need for flexibility and autonomy with the benefits of in-person collaboration and team cohesion. This entails the development of policies and practices that accommodate diverse work preferences and styles, while maintaining a shared sense of purpose and commitment to the organization's objectives (Gandrita, Gandrita & Rosado, 2022).

In the hybrid work environment, leaders must also address potential disparities in opportunities, visibility, and career advancement between remote and in-person employees. By establishing clear performance metrics and ensuring equitable access to resources and mentorship, leaders can mitigate the risks of inequity and promote a culture of inclusivity (Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020).

As organizations continue to evolve and adapt to the changing landscape of work, agile leadership will be instrumental in navigating the transition to remote and hybrid models, authors such as McKnight (2013) imply. By embracing the principles of adaptability, resilience, and continuous learning, leaders can guide their teams and organizations through the complexities of change, ensuring long-term success in an increasingly interconnected and rapidly evolving world (Sull, Sull & Bersin, 2020).

The concept of agility originates primarily in the IT management field, where it emerged as a response to the ever-evolving market dynamics and rapidly changing conditions (Hackl & Gerpott, 2015; Schiefer & Nitsche, 2019). The central objective of the ongoing shift toward an agile organizational culture is to continuously adapt structures to ensure the survival and competitiveness of companies. Agility is not an end goal, but rather an essential adaptive capacity that helps organizations avoid stagnation (Häusling & Fischer, 2016).

Several authors define agility as an organization's ability to swiftly adapt to fluctuating and sometimes unpredictable circumstances in order to ensure long-term success (Goldman et al., 1995, p. 8). Dove (2002) outlines fundamental abilities and characteristics that organizations need to possess to thrive in such an environment, emphasizing innovation, readiness for change, and the capacity to anticipate, quickly respond to, and continuously adapt to changes. Active employee involvement and continuous learning are also critical factors (Dove, 2002).

Various definitions of agility highlight speed and adaptability as its key features, while also noting that the construct goes beyond mere reactive adaptation, striving for proactive market action (Hackl & Gerpott, 2015; Dove, 2002; Goldman et al., 1995). The agile organization model distinguishes between agility drivers, capabilities, and generators. Changes represent agility drivers, determining organizational needs or intentions to become agile. These drivers encompass shifts in the business landscape, such as evolving customer demands, digital transformations, and fluctuating market conditions. Social factors, like demographic changes, internal cultural challenges, and complex market interactions, also play a significant role (Sharifi & Zhang, 1999).

Creating agility in an operational context can be achieved through both direct and indirect means. Goldman et al. (1996) stress the importance of embedding specific values in corporate culture, such as self-organization, responsibility delegation, lifelong learning, and employee participation. Agile organizations are also characterized by flexible and lean structures that enable innovative and customer-centric thinking and actions. Häusling and Fischer (2016) highlight the importance of embracing new technologies and rapidly adapting processes, cultures, and employees in qualitative and quantitative terms. In this context, agility will be examined through the lens of corporate culture, initially focusing on the general cultural framework before exploring the development of agile cultures.

Particular Challenges of Leadership in Remote Settings

Leadership in remote and hybrid environments presents unique challenges that require a distinct set of skills and approaches. Among the most pressing concerns are maintaining effective communication (Clutterbuck & Hirst, 2002), fostering team cohesion (Callow et al., 2009), ensuring equitable opportunities for all team members (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014), and adapting to the nuances of team structures within hybrid work settings (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018).

Communication is a cornerstone of successful leadership, and it becomes even more critical in remote and hybrid environments. The lack of spontaneous face-to-face interactions and informal communication channels can lead to misunderstandings and feelings of isolation. (Clutterbuck & Hirst, 2002). Leaders must proactively establish clear communication protocols, utilize a variety of tools and platforms, and set expectations for responsiveness and engagement to bridge these gaps (Zulch, 2014).

Fostering team cohesion is another challenge that leaders face in remote and hybrid contexts. The absence of shared physical spaces can hinder the development of rapport and trust among team members. To mitigate this, leaders must prioritize team-building activities, both virtually and in-person, that facilitate relationship-building and shared experiences. Additionally, creating opportunities for informal conversations and social interactions can help maintain a sense of camaraderie and belonging within the team (Callow et al., 2009).

Ensuring equitable opportunities in hybrid environments is a complex issue that leaders must address. Remote employees may experience reduced visibility, access to resources, and opportunities for career advancement compared to their in-person counterparts. Dowling, B., Goldstein, D., Park, M., & Price, H. (2022) Leaders must be vigilant in monitoring and addressing such disparities, implementing practices that foster a level playing field for all team members. This may include setting clear expectations for performance evaluation, promoting transparency in decision-making, and actively seeking input from remote team members (Odom, Franczak & McAllister, 2022).

In hybrid environments, team structures can undergo significant changes as organizations experiment with various configurations to optimize productivity and collaboration. Some teams may become fully remote, while others may adopt a more flexible approach, with team members working in-person on certain days and remotely on others (Babapour Chafi, 2022). Leaders must be prepared to navigate the complexities of these evolving team structures, tailoring their leadership style and strategies to suit the specific needs of each configuration (Pullan, 2022).

One of the challenges associated with shifting team structures is the potential for the emergence of subgroups or "cliques" within hybrid teams. In-person employees may develop stronger bonds with each other due to their shared physical presence, while remote employees may experience feelings of exclusion (Pullan, 2022). According to the author, leaders must actively work to bridge these divides by encouraging cross-functional collaboration, rotating team members between remote and in-person assignments and providing opportunities for all team members to contribute equally during meetings and discussions (Pullan, 2022).

Another challenge is adapting performance management and feedback mechanisms to accommodate the changing team structures in hybrid environments. Leaders must develop clear and consistent criteria for evaluating performance, taking into account the unique circumstances of remote and in-person work. They must also establish regular feedback channels, enabling team members to voice their concerns, share their achievements, and receive constructive guidance for their professional development (Bui, 2019).

Agile leadership can be highly beneficial when introducing remote and hybrid work models, as it emphasizes adaptability, flexibility, and collaboration (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020). In remote and hybrid work environments, organizations need to

quickly respond to changing circumstances and adapt their processes to ensure seamless communication and collaboration among team members. Agile leaders, with their focus on continuous improvement and adaptability, can effectively guide their teams through the necessary adjustments, creating an environment that fosters innovation and supports the successful implementation of remote and hybrid work models (Parker, Holesgrove & Pathak, 2015).

Moreover, agile leadership promotes a culture of trust and empowerment, which is crucial for maintaining employee engagement and productivity in remote and hybrid work settings (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020). When team members are working remotely or in a hybrid setting, it becomes even more important for leaders to trust their employees and give them the autonomy to manage their own work. Agile leaders empower their teams by setting clear expectations and providing the necessary resources, support, and guidance, while also allowing team members to take ownership of their work and make decisions based on their expertise (Steude, 2021).

Change management is an integral aspect of introducing remote and hybrid work models, as it involves addressing the concerns, resistance, and potential challenges that may arise during the transition. Agile leadership principles can be instrumental in supporting effective change management processes (Parker, Holesgrove & Pathak, 2015). Agile leaders are skilled at fostering open communication and collaboration, creating an environment in which concerns and challenges can be openly discussed and addressed. By promoting a culture of transparency and continuous learning, agile leaders can help their teams navigate the complexities of change and ensure a smoother transition to remote or hybrid work (Theobald, Prenner, Krieg & Schneider, 2020).

Lastly, agile leadership practices emphasize the importance of feedback and iterative improvement, which can be invaluable in fine-tuning remote and hybrid work processes. By actively seeking feedback from team members and stakeholders, agile leaders can identify areas that require improvement or adjustment and make data-driven decisions to optimize work processes (Hayward, 2021). This iterative approach allows organizations to continuously refine their remote and hybrid work models, ensuring that they remain effective and sustainable in the long term. Overall, agile leadership offers a valuable framework for successfully introducing and managing remote and hybrid work environments, while also providing essential support for change management efforts (Reunamäki & Fey, 2022).

Leaders and Change – The Role of Agility in Change Management

For the present study a qualitative research approach was used (Thunberg & Arnell, 2022; Van audenhove & Donders, 2019). Standardized expert interviews were conducted to address the research question presented introducing this paper and to build on the existing state of research.

Methodology and Research Approach

In selecting the sample for this study, attention was paid to the definitions of middle management and SMEs, with participants representing the intersection of these two groups as middle managers in SMEs. Middle managers were selected due to their special role in shaping agile leadership and change management, as they are in a highly relevant position with regard to both concepts (Wilhelmson, Johansson, & Döös, 2013).

One limitation of the study is that only IT and software companies were selected. The 11 interviewees had an average age of 40.6 years and 8.9 years of management experience. Ten managers were male, and one was female, meaning the gender composition does not accurately reflect the field of practice with regard to the socio-demographic cross-section.

In addition to these formal selection aspects (position, company size, company sector), care was taken to select only those who have had experience with the introduction of agile approaches in their management activities, ensuring a good fit between the sample, research question, and chosen research instrument (Bortz & Döring, 2007).

To guarantee the quality of the empirical study, compliance with common quality criteria of empirical research was maintained throughout the process, following the recommendations of Bortz and Döring (2007) on designing reliable and valid measuring instruments in qualitative research. Both macro and micro levels were considered in planning, with basic quality criteria such as objectivity, reliability, and validity being adhered to throughout the study's implementation and evaluation of results.

The interview guide followed macro and micro planning, with an introductory topic block addressing reasons for introducing agile leadership methods, a second topic block discussing challenges and consequences of the introduction, a third block focusing on challenges for managers at lower and middle hierarchy levels, and a concluding set of questions exploring how managers can meet challenges and the support measures and resources provided by the company. The study followed Mayring's (2010, 2012) approach of structuring content analysis, using deductive categories to analyze the data material.

Central Findings

Specific Challenges when Introducing Agile Collaboration

The adoption of agile working methods impacts employees and customers alike. Experts emphasize the importance of involving customers in the process, as the company's work approach—such as using sprints or foregoing in-depth planning—must be transparent to them (I1m, 2020). While sprints can be demanding for

employees and the organization, customer involvement is essential to maintain project efficiency (I1m, 2020).

Agile work structures offer customers several advantages, including continuous integration and deployment approaches that allow for the integration of new requirements or the fulfillment of evolving needs during project work (I2m, 2020; I6m, 2020; I7m, 2020; I9w, 2020; I10m, 2020). This approach also facilitates direct problem-solving with sustainable solution concepts involving all stakeholders (I6m, 2020). Customers are, therefore, more closely involved in the project (I10m, 2020), resulting in increased flexibility and employee attachment to the organization (I6m, 2020; I9w, 2020), ultimately intensifying the working relationship (I9w, 2020).

Agile organizations are better equipped to handle projects that require the expertise of different teams and departments (I5m, 2020). By creating a larger context, employees are more likely to identify with the project, keeping the big picture in mind instead of focusing on micromanagement (I5m, 2020; I6m, 2020; I8m, 2020). However, this requires a shift in mindset for long-time customers and employees accustomed to existing processes (I6m, 2020). Addressing this challenge involves empathizing with others and considering their perspective in the given situation (I6m, 2020).

Conflicts may arise as hierarchical and communication structures change in agile environments (I7m, 2020; I8m, 2020). With the team as a whole becoming the point of contact, issues can emerge when employees or customers struggle to engage in team discussions and opt for alternative communication methods. This disturbance can stem from closer cooperation and increased team relevance, highlighting misunderstandings among employees (I8m, 2020). Miscommunication, especially regarding responsibility transfer, can significantly impact team processes and long-term results (I8m, 2020).

Agile leadership is centered on trust, direction, and responsibility transfer (I8m, 2020), which may be novel concepts for many employees. They are now expected to make decisions, coordinate within the team, and assume responsibility for their mistakes (I9w, 2020). To address potential unrest or conflicts, experts suggest regular reviews and reflections as core elements of the process (I11m, 2020). Communication, both external and internal, is crucial for maintaining team cohesion and navigating the complexities of agile leadership.

Transitioning to agile work structures inherently involves a classic change process that may encounter resistance from various actors, as they may hold preconceived notions about how it should work (I1m, 2020). While some actors may be open to the changes, others may find it challenging to accept the new structures, which require a significant shift in thinking (I1m, 2020; I2m, 2020; I5m, 2020; I6m, 2020; I7m, 2020; I8m, 2020; I11m, 2020). There may also be criticism about deviations from textbook agile methods, necessitating adaptations to maintain productivity and planning security (I1m, 2020).

One approach to overcoming these resistances is building trust and obtaining resources, thus enabling agile living (I2m, 2020). This requires creating a suitable environment for agile work structures and dispelling misconceptions—for example, that there is no plan or goal in agile organizations, and that everyone can do as they please (I2m, 2020). Instead, it must be demonstrated how freedom increases and uncertainty decreases simultaneously (I2m, 2020; I4m, 2020; I5m, 2020; I7m, 2020; I8m, 2020; I10m, 2020).

Recognizing and addressing the fears, difficulties, and insecurities arising during the change process is crucial (I8m, 2020). Involving actors more intensely in decision-making and implementation processes, in line with agile principles, can foster a sense of belonging to the big picture (I3m, 2020). This approach helps dissolve the lone-fighter mentality and encourages collective effort towards a shared goal (I3m, 2020; I4m, 2020).

Increased responsibility is a key element of agile structures, which can be more manageable when individuals feel part of the whole (I6m, 2020). However, this may be met with resistance, especially from employees accustomed to having organization, structuring, and planning dictated by managers (I6m, 2020).

Addressing resistance is essential and should involve discussions and adjustments as needed (I7m, 2020; I9w, 2020). This can manifest as reassigning individual employees to expert roles if team dynamics are not conducive to their success (I7m, 2020), or through events, training courses, and intranet presentations (I9w, 2020).

The introduction of agility brings various consequences to company-wide structures, such as the need to convert all departments to agile working structures (I1m, 2020, line 37). This requires finding a process that works for everyone (I1m, 2020, line 77; I6m, 2020, line 21; I8m, 2020, line 69). Rethinking old processes and learning from mistakes is essential (I2m, 2020, line 27; I6m, 2020, line 29; I8m, 2020, line 37; I9w, 2020, line 99). Trust and responsibility among all participants is crucial, as is greater involvement and transparency (I3m, 2020, line 13; I8m, 2020, line 39; I4m, 2020, line 41; I8m, 2020, line 71). Coordination efforts must be implemented accordingly (I6m, 2020, line 37).

Employee feedback regarding the introduction of agility was initially divided (I1m, 2020, line 39; I9w, 2020, line 31). Some questioned the decision-making processes and new role distributions (I1m, 2020, line 39), while others appreciated the involvement and identification with the process (I3m, 2020, line 23; I4m, 2020, line 43; I6m, 2020, line 63; I7m, 2020, line 55; I9w, 2020, line 33; I11m, 2020, line 31). Most employees ultimately did not want to return to the previous model (I10m, 2020, line 35).

Team building is essential when introducing agile working structures (I1m, 2020, line 73). New processes must be considered in the context of old ones to establish an

understanding of the agile approach's efficiency (I3m, 2020, line 31; I7m, 2020, line 25; I9w, 2020, line 67; I10m, 2020, line 57; I11m, 2020, line 51). Encouraging communication and distributing responsibility among all staff members is important (I4m, 2020, Z. 15; I5m, 2020, line 23). Closely coordinated processes in the team lead to better decision-making in the interest of all actors (I6m, 2020, line 31; I8m, 2020, line 79).

Outlook and Critical Discussion

The findings from the interviews on the introduction of agile leadership can be insightful when considering the challenges leaders face in introducing a new work environment, such as hybrid and remote work. Two key aspects that stand out are the necessity of change management and the importance of employee empowerment.

Change management is crucial in both agile leadership and the introduction remote work scenarios, as they require a shift in mindset and organizational culture. Leaders play a pivotal role in facilitating this transition by effectively communicating the benefits and challenges of the new work environment, managing employees' expectations, and addressing their concerns. Providing adequate support and resources during this process is vital to ensure a smooth adaptation to remote work. Just as with agile leadership, leaders must be prepared to guide their teams through the changes associated with remote work while maintaining productivity and engagement.

Empowerment and autonomy are significant elements in agile leadership, where employees are encouraged to take ownership of their tasks and make decisions independently. This aspect is equally important in remote work environments, as employees need to be trusted to manage their time and tasks without constant supervision. Leaders must find the right balance between offering guidance and support, while also allowing employees to be autonomous and accountable for their performance.

In addition to these aspects, effective communication and collaboration are essential in both agile and remote work settings. Leaders need to adapt to new ways of collaborating, using digital tools and platforms to facilitate communication and promote a culture of openness and transparency.

The initial research question aimed to identify the specific challenges leaders face when introducing remote or hybrid work and to draw lessons from the findings regarding the introduction of agile leadership. In addressing this research question, it is essential to consider the parallels and distinctions between implementing agile leadership and transitioning to remote or hybrid work environments.

One major challenge leaders face when introducing remote or hybrid work is managing the shift in mindset and organizational culture. Agile leadership principles emphasize flexibility, adaptability, and employee empowerment, which can be applied to remote or hybrid work scenarios. Leaders must effectively communicate

the benefits and challenges of the new work environment, manage employees' expectations, and address concerns to ensure a smooth transition. Providing adequate support and resources during this process is crucial, as is fostering a sense of trust and autonomy among employees, allowing them to manage their tasks and time independently.

Additionally, leaders need to prioritize employee well-being in remote and hybrid work contexts. Agile leadership principles can be applied to support employee well-being, as they emphasize balance, adaptability, and flexibility. Leaders must be mindful of potential stressors associated with remote work, such as feelings of isolation and work-life balance issues, and actively address these concerns to create a supportive and inclusive team environment.

The differences in leadership between remote and hybrid work environments are also important to consider. In a hybrid setting, some employees work remotely while others work on-site, leading to mixed teams. This can present unique challenges for leaders, as they must ensure equitable communication and collaboration among all team members, regardless of their location. One key challenge is to avoid inadvertently creating a divide between remote and on-site employees. Leaders must develop specific communication approaches that foster inclusiveness and ensure all employees have equal access to information, resources, and opportunities for collaboration.

Returning to a hybrid work environment after remote work can be challenging for employees who have grown accustomed to the benefits of remote work, such as increased flexibility and reduced commuting. This may result in some employees feeling discontent or disengaged when transitioning back to a hybrid model. Leaders need to be mindful of these sentiments and address them proactively by providing ongoing support, emphasizing the advantages of hybrid work.

In mixed teams, it is crucial for leaders to be aware of potential disparities in access to resources, information, and opportunities between remote and on-site employees. They must actively work to bridge these gaps and ensure all team members can contribute effectively, regardless of their location.

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