



MASTER THESIS

**Working at home - working alone:
How e-leaders and teleworkers
experience their relationship in a virtual
environment**

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Abstract

Purpose:

While teleworking has many positive implications, it also raises concerns about professional isolation and its consequences. E-leaders need to be able to enact leadership in new ways to be able to combat their employees feeling of professional isolation and build on a meaningful Leader-Member Exchange. The objective of this study is to identify the activities leaders engage in, how the role of leadership is changing and how employees experience the relationship with their leader.

Method:

The data for this study was collected by the means of semi-structured interviews among four clusters of co-workers and their direct leaders. All 16 interviews were coded and analyzed and were subsequently checked for intercoder reliability. Through analysis, four relevant dimensions emerged: support vs. demand, proximity vs. distance, trust vs. control, and leader initiative vs. own initiative.

Results:

Participants described support, proximity, and trust as important building stones of a meaningful relationship whereas being demanding distant, and controlling hampers the forming of a meaningful relationship. Simple acts of support can help employees feel less isolated while working remotely. These experiences further seem to be shaped by the individual's personality type as well as team size.

Conclusion:

The way that teleworkers and e-leaders experience relationships at the workplace depend on many factors. Those with more meaningful relationships may continue to receive greater benefits which can further improve their relationship. However, building and maintain a meaningful relationship in an online context is not always easy and may call for the role of a leader to change towards a more people-oriented rather than task-oriented approach.

E-leadership, Professional Isolation, Teleworking, Leader-Member Exchange

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Introduction

The rise of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has led to a transformation in modern work environments, enabling quick communication, constant accessibility, and flexibility in the workplace. This change has led many to work from remote locations, such as one's home, employing ICTs to communicate and complete their task which is often referred to as teleworking (Baruch, 2001). Teleworking does not only have an impact on employees' practices and feelings but also affects the way that leaders have to lead and communicate. Previous studies exploring the work relationships of teleworkers focussed mostly on teams where only a few individuals worked remotely (Rockmann & Pratt, 2015). The advancements in technology, however, have caused more people to work remotely, changing the dynamics at the workplace, including relationships. This increase in teleworking is further enhanced by the pandemic of the coronavirus, forcing companies and employees alike to shift to an online work environment.

The shift from working in the office to working from home happened rather rapidly. In many cases, employees finished their workday, leaving work expecting to return the next day. However, following the press conference of the Dutch government, announcing the closing of workplaces and schools alike, this never happened. Employees, as well as leaders, were left unprepared for the weeks to follow, many finding themselves in an unknown situation. For several, this development meant juggling their kids staying at home, household tasks as well as work. All from the same, confined space, often straining concentration and efficiency. A major change also surrounded the workplace contacts: where one could previously stay in touch with colleagues over lunch now only saw them for scheduled meetings, often influencing the relationships they had at work.

One of the most relevant relationships at the workplace is the relationship between the supervisor and the employee. In literature, it is argued that the relationships between teleworkers and their supervisors become increasingly personal compared to regular office employees (Collins, Hislop & Cartwright, 2016). This is due to the fact that supervisors get a more direct insight into the employees' personal life and private space. Additionally, Halford (2005) suggests that the relationship between supervisors and teleworkers is often growing to be more personal as a monitoring function. This happens for two reasons: 1) the leader is reaching out to their employees working from home more often for task-related topics as well as checking in on the personal welling and 2) teleworkers often become more productive at home as a mechanism to show their leader that they are trustworthy and capable. On the other hand, literature suggests that teleworkers are often less in the focus of the supervisors, as they are not as present as their office-based colleagues (Collins et al., 2016; Hill, Ferris & Mårtinson, 2003; Rockmann & Pratt, 2015). The amount of trust the manager has could influence, for example, the tasks given and the amount of control exerted virtually, which is often related to the Leader-Member Exchange Theory and could significantly differ between individuals that see their

leader daily and those that work from home. According to Collins et al. (2016), this relation between trust and perceived benefits is not sufficiently researched yet as well as the general relation between teleworkers and supervisors. Amongst others, seeing one another face-to-face in the office serves as an important factor in establishing trust between people (Coenen & Kok, 2014) as well as exchanging anecdotes and work-related information. However, it is not clear yet how much video-calling can be seen as a substitute for face-to-face contact, especially with regard to the forming and maintaining of relationships.

It becomes apparent that the forming of meaningful relationships, conversations, and relationship management activities by leaders in an online environment is crucial to ensuring a healthy work atmosphere. Generally, leading in an online environment is referred to as e-leadership (Avolio & Kahai, 2003). High-quality e-leadership is important to ensure employee well-being as well as work quality and satisfaction. One of the most prominent theories of the field to assess the quality of a relationship between leader and employee is the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). While this theory was developed for an offline environment, some studies employ it in an online context (Jawadi, Daassi, Favier & Kalika, 2013), however, an adjusted model for virtual context is still needed and research into the dynamics of fully teleworking teams is scarce. While a high-quality relationship has many benefits, leaders need to ensure to build and maintain these, as low-quality relationships have several negative implications such as a high turnover rate. Generally, the quality of the relationship directly affects employee work attitudes as well as behaviors (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti & Van den Heuvel, 2015). Working remotely, hereby introduces many new challenges and obstacles to overcome as well as adjusting known practices to a teleworking environment.

Teleworking can have a positive impact on employees' work satisfaction, especially in situations where the contact with the other office employees is perceived as negative (Collins et al., 2016) as well as generally facilitating a better work-life balance and increase satisfaction (Liao, 2017). However, working remotely also comes with the thread of professional isolation, which negatively impacts the work satisfaction of employees (Bentley et al., 2016). Professional isolation is defined as a reduction in opportunities for promotion, receiving rewards, or personal development (Cooper & Kurland, 2002). This professional isolation can be combat by having meaningful conversations with other employees or supervisors. However, if the perceived degree of professional isolation gets too high, this will negatively influence workplace relationships and is an important factor to consider when exploring relationships at the workplace.

As professional isolation of employees in an online environment is an important challenge of today's work environment, insight into the daily activities of leaders and employees with regard to social contacts and what kind of impact the conversations have on the employees need to be gathered. These insights can be used to offer practical guidance to leaders on how to combat the professional isolation of their employees as well as build a meaningful relationship to prevent professional isolation

in the first place. This research aims to explore the ways through which e-leaders and teleworkers enact their relationship to create a meaningful connection with one another and combat professional isolation in a virtual environment.

The research question this study aims to answer is:

How do e-leaders and teleworkers perceive their relationship in a virtual environment?

Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, an outline will be given of existing theories and concepts which are important when looking at relationships at the workplace in an online environment. One theory that can not be overlooked when talking about the relationship between leader and member, is the Leader-Member-Exchange Theory. The theory is using the quality of workplace relationships to assess benefits and disadvantages resulting from it, the latter possibly negatively affecting an employee's sense of belonging. Then, previous research has suggested that working from a remote location can harm employees feeling of connectedness to their workplace and colleagues, thus causing professional isolation. The final theoretical building block is the concept of e-leadership, which describes leadership and relationship management activities in an online context and relating to both the LMX as well as professional isolation.

Leader-Member-Exchange Theory

The Leader-Member-Exchange (LMX) theory was developed by Graen and Cashman in 1975 (as mentioned in Peng, 2020) and is one of the more established theories in the field. Generally, LMX is used to assess the nature and quality of the relationship between leaders and employees (e.g. Cortallazzo, Bruni & Zampieri, 2019; Jawadi et al., 2013). The theory states that leaders develop a unique exchange relationship with their leader at the workplace (Breevart et al., 2015).

LMX is often associated with other exchange theories. Yang et al. (2020) state that in the dyadic exchange, both the leader and the employee have expectations about the benefit or cost of a relationship. Further, relationships formed for economic purposes can be transformed into a social exchange relationship, if the connection between the leader and the employee is meaningful (Peng, 2020). Further, it is argued that a high-quality Leader-Member Exchange may help intrinsically motivate employees to become engaged at their workplace, thus being more committed (Breevart et al., 2015).

According to the LMX theory, leaders and employees form differentiated relationships

through work-related exchanges (Jawadi et al., 2013). This means, that some connections formed will be stronger and more meaningful than others. The unique relationships formed are constantly changing based on how each party fulfills the expectations of the others and the expectations attached to their role (Volmer, Niessen, Spurk, Linz, & Abele, 2011). Mumtaz and Rowley (2019) describe that the leaders may deter from strictly formal conventions to empower and support those employees that they have a high-quality relationship with. Breevart et al. (2015) go even further and describe that those with a meaningful relationship with their leader more often receive the freedom to choose their own work tasks as well as decide how to execute them. Those that have a low qualitative relationship with their leader, may receive fewer benefits and therefore have a disadvantage at the workplace.

Multiple authors link high-quality LMX to the concept of trust (Jawahar, Stone & Kluemper, 2019). De Vries, Tummers, and Bekkers (2019) describe that social exchange, as well as reciprocity, are effective tools to develop trust between leader and follower, whereas low-quality relationships stay contractual. This is in line with Breevart et al. (2015) who mention that a bond is often built on trust as well as mutual obligations, further highlighting the reciprocity. Furthermore, it is believed that the effect of trust is especially strong when employees also feel empowered (Jawahar et al., 2019).

Additionally, high-quality LMX can improve the relationship between employee and leader so much, that the employees can take over higher roles, sometimes naturally growing through the relationship (Hooper & Martin, 2008). Others argue that this high-quality relationship is maturing over time, suggesting that there may be different requirements for a relationship depending on tenure (Park, Sturman, Vanderpool & Chan, 2015).

Lastly, in their research De Vries et al. (2019) found LMX to be an effective tool in which the facilitated trust helps reduce professional isolation in teleworkers who do not have the option to interact with others face-to-face.

Professional Isolation

Professional isolation is an important concept when looking at teleworking. However, it is not limited to those employees. Professional isolation is defined as an employee's state of mind or belief, that one is out of touch with others in the workplace (Diekema, 1992). This phenomenon is more likely to occur with teleworkers, as they are less likely to experience meaningful conversations in the same frequency as traditional office workers would. Bentley et al. (2016) describe this as a person-environment mismatch, where the missing support from the organization as well as the lack of social interaction is causing teleworkers to experience professional isolation.

Teleworkers can experience isolation in relation to the workplace in two ways: professionally and socially. Professionally, teleworkers fear reduced career possibilities, while socially, teleworkers lack informal interaction with others (De Vries et al., 2019; Kurland & Cooper, 2002). While social isolation may decrease depending on whether employees work at home or a remote office,

professional isolation of teleworkers can increase regardless (Kurland & Cooper, 2002).

Professional isolation has many negative implications. Teleworkers that feel isolated are often less confident in their abilities and knowledge, which can have an impact on their job performance (Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008). A feeling of professional isolation may also hinder employee development, as this process is fostered through informal day-to-day experiences and activities (Cooper & Kurland, 2002). It becomes increasingly harder for teleworkers to coordinate complex tasks, as they are missing relevant relationships for exchange which hampers their work performance and increases their feeling of isolation (Bentley et al., 2016). In addition to that, professional isolation is likely to increase turnover intention (Golden et al., 2008). This can be explained by teleworkers' desire to combat their isolation drastically, seeking comfort and change at a different organization.

E-leadership

The rapid growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and the from that resulting increase of employees working remotely, calls for a new style of leadership. Leaders have to learn to adjust to the virtual environment and become leaders online, thus introducing the concept of e-leadership (Avolio & Kahai, 2003). At its core, leadership, as well as e-leadership, is about the development of work relationships. (Avolio & Kahai, 2003). E-leaders are expected to be familiar with new ICTs and know how to operate them (Groysberg, 2014). Jawadi et al. (2013) further expand this and note that e-leaders need to make use of multiple communication channels that vary in richness. Avolio and Kahai (2003), the pioneers in this field, suggest that due to virtuality the entire essence of how employees perceive leaders to be present may be changing.

Roman et al. (2018) composed a complete definition of e-leadership, providing more insight into what e-leadership inherits. According to them:

E-leadership is a set of technology-mediated social influencing processes intended to change attitudes, feelings, thinking, behavior, and performance, which are based on ability to communicate clearly and appropriately, provide adequate social interaction, inspire and manage change, build and hold teams accountable, demonstrate technological know-how related to ICTs, and develop a sense of trust in virtual environments. (Roman et al., 2018, p. 10)

As e-leaders have an important relationship with their employees, they must keep up with their employee's work. Good e-leadership has a direct positive impact on employee performance (Wolor et al., 2020). E-leaders need to ensure to create a digital environment for their employees that enables them to work effectively, including concepts such as high productivity and low turnover (Roman et al., 2018). This includes motivating and supporting their employees, in order to ensure that their

employees keep improving (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). Lastly, building good relationships with their employees is crucial to ensure knowledge exchange and meaningful conversations.

This can be achieved by relationship management, which remains challenging for e-leaders, as they do not have the same opportunities as they would have face-to-face (Jawadi et al., 2013). In their research, Van Wart et al. (2017) propose that e-leaders competencies are a crucial aspect in establishing a meaningful relationship with their employees. Some of the e-competencies mentioned by Van Wart et al. (2017) are e-communication skills, e-social skills, e-team building skills, and e-trustworthiness help establishing a positive connection with the leader as well as fostering collaboration, higher productivity as well as improved employee satisfaction.

Yet, e-leadership, especially in its developing stages, may not only be a task performed by an individual leader but rather a system operating on an organizational level (Torre & Sarti, 2020). All members of an organization constantly shape what leadership incorporates. Torre and Sarti (2020) describe that an ideal e-leader should be able to combine resources and behaviors and facilitate their employees to become collaborators rather than subordinates.

Overview and Novelty

The research's theoretical foundation is built on three pillars: 1) Leader-Member Exchange 2) Professional isolation and 3) E-leadership. LMX is an established theory used to assess the quality of relationships built between leader and employee and is built on social exchange theories. This theory differentiates between high-quality relationships, which offer several benefits to the employee, and low-quality relationships in which the nature of the relationship stays purely contractual. Professional isolation occurs frequently in teleworkers who feel like they are out of touch with their colleagues and leader and as a result, can negatively influence a person's confidence and abilities. This occurs because employees experience less meaningful conversations as well as less perceived support. Lastly, e-leadership is concerned with the act of leading as well as developing relationships in a virtual environment, mediated by ICTs, to influence attitudes, behaviors, and performance as well as facilitate trust. Good e-leadership should facilitate a high-quality relationship which in turn can combat negative feelings at or about the workplace, depending on the level of e-skills the leader possesses.

This study is unique in so far, that most studies relating to teleworkers' relationships, needs, and experiences focus on companies in which only few employees work remotely while this study's main focus is on teams where most if not all individuals work remotely. That way, this research fills the gap of how dynamics work in this context. An important factor to keep in mind is that opposed to virtual teams that are globally dispersed, the participants in this study did not choose to work remotely but rather were forced to due to COVID-19 which adds another unique dynamic to the research. Further, the application of the LMX in online environments has thus far been underrepresented in

research. Additionally, this research is going to interview both leaders and their respective employees whereas many studies in the field so far focus their research on only one of them.

Method

Design

In this study, a qualitative study design was employed. In order to collect data, semi-structured interviews were conducted to get an insight into the participants' experiences and feelings concerning the topic. The study is of explorative nature. The collected data is rather sensitive as it is dealing with leadership quality as well as isolation and therefore had to be treated carefully. For participants to still be willing to disclose such sensitive information, a trustful environment needed to be created which can be achieved in interviews through rapport (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Heath, Williamson, William & Harcourt, 2018). All interviews were conducted in an online environment, which means that all participants could take part from their own homes which potentially help the participant to speak more freely (Lo Iacono et al., 2016). The participants were able to choose which video-calling software they preferred to use for the interviews. In the end, a wide variety of video software was used among which MS Teams, Google Meet, and Zoom.

Before the start of the data collection, a research plan of the study at hand was submitted to the Ethical Committee of the University of Twente. This was done to ensure that all steps taken during the research conformed to ethical norms and regulations and that no participants would be harmed in any way during the process. The approval of the Ethical Committee was granted without further comments.

All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants, using OBS Studio. The recording was limited to audio to ensure the participants could stay as anonymous as possible. At the start of the study, the participants were informed about their rights to withdraw from the study at any point as well as how their personal data would be treated. Subsequently, the participants were asked whether they agreed with the aforementioned information as well as their consent for the recording before continuing with the actual interview. At the end of the interview, all participants were given the opportunity to express questions or concerns with regard to the interview.

Data Collection and Instrument

The data collection was done by the means of semi-structured interviews which were conducted over the span of five weeks. Initially, the interviews were supposed to last one hour, however, due to time restrictions of the participants this time was lowered to 30-45 minutes per participant. The set of

questions for leaders as opposed to the questions for the employees differed slightly.

The questions for the employees were split into separate parts: general questions regarding the workplace, leadership, contact moments, and professional isolation. The questions for the (team)leader were including the same categories, however, relating more to the steps they regard as necessary to ensure a good work atmosphere as well as employee well-being. The full interview guide used can be found in Appendix A.

All participants were informed at the beginning of the interview, that they could respond to the questions in Dutch if they were more comfortable with that. This step was taken to ensure participants were as comfortable as possible and that there was not going to be a language barrier preventing them from expressing their emotions properly. Nevertheless, all participants except one expressed that they were comfortable answering the questions in English and only used Dutch words if they could not come up with the English equivalent. However, before the interview process started, the interviewer made sure to translate the list of questions into Dutch, in case participants would not understand a question.

In order to find participants for this research, the network of the researcher was contacted via LinkedIn and email. There were only few inclusion criteria formulated. The inclusion criteria were that participants had to be above 18 years and have been working remotely at their respective company and preferably already experienced working from the office beforehand. Further, it was important that one participant of each team was their respective leader. The study focused on companies and teams within the Netherlands, however, nationality itself was not an exclusion criterion.

General questions

The general questions were meant to get the interviewee comfortable in the interview, with easy questions so they could talk starting about their work on their own terms. Those, where the teleworking situation was not entirely clear beforehand, were asked to elaborate on it. Then, participants were asked to illustrate how a typical workday in the home office looked like. This allowed them to freely talk about aspects of their work that they thought were important. If relevant, follow-up questions were asked.

Contact

Then, some more probing questions about the contact with their team and leader were asked, if possible based on the previous description of their workday, as that should include contact moments with their respective colleagues and/or leaders. This included the focus of the nature of contact, frequency of contact, and overall experience of contact and how this has changed as opposed to the

normal office situation. The questions for the leader were concerning how they experienced the dynamic in their team now and how available/active they still were in the day-to-day dynamics.

Leadership

The questions with regard to leadership were centered around the participants' perception of what good leadership means, which qualities a good leader has, and how this compares to their situation.

Additionally, they were asked if they would do anything differently as well as which activities they perceived as helpful for building and maintain a relationship. Further, they were asked whether it was easy to get in touch with their leader. The questions for their leader revolved around how they experienced leading in an online environment, what the biggest challenges and changes were, and what they think new starting employees would need to build a relationship with their leader as well as the team.

Professional isolation

To ease the participants into this sensitive topic, they were asked what the biggest challenge of working from home was for them. Based on that follow-up questions were asked. They were asked whether they felt like they could contact their leader with issues, whether personal or professional, at all times and what they thought their leader could do to help them with their problems. The questions for the leader were more related to whether they thought they had a good overview of what was going on within their team as well as with their employees personally. Additionally, they were asked whether they think their employees would be comfortable contacting them with their issues and if they would do something about it.

Participants

Table 1.

Overview of the teams			
Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4
Leader 1	Leader 2	Leader 3	Leader 4
Teleworker 1.1	Teleworker 2.1	Teleworker 3.1	Teleworker 4.1
Teleworker 1.2	Teleworker 2.2	Teleworker 3.2	Teleworker 4.2
Teleworker 1.3	Teleworker 2.3	Teleworker 3.3	
	Teleworker 2.4		

To gain insight into the topic, a sample of 16 participants was collected. These participants were divided into four clusters based on which team they belonged to, each consisting of a team leader and two to five of their employees each. An overview of the teams can be found in Table 1. As this was only a sample of the actual team, the respective teams were all bigger than the final sample. Of the four teams, three were working completely from home, with exceptional one-on-one meetings if necessary. Team 3 had a schedule that allowed them to work from home part-time and still see their colleagues in the office. However, the team works on divided locations, meaning that they are still relying on telecommunication tools to keep in touch with the other part of the team.

Of the 16 participants, 12 were female and four were male. All team leaders of this sample were female. The teams varied in size with team one having a total of six members, team two having roughly 12 members, team three having more than 30 members, and team four having more than 20 members. An overview can be found in Table 2. All teams are located in the Netherlands. Three of the teams hereby were working in Marketing/Communications and one team in Public Relations. Most of the participants already had a lot of work experience and had been working for the respective company for more than a year at the time of the interview. Only three of the participants had started at their company less than a year prior to the interview, of which two were from Team 2. However, one of the participants of Team 2 already had a significant amount of experience in the same field beforehand. The age differed largely per team, however, Team 1 generally had the youngest team altogether. The other teams, while also differing within the teams themselves, were rather similar in age.

Table 2.

Overview of participant characteristics

Characteristics	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Total
Gender					
Male	1	1	1	1	4
Female	3	4	3	2	12
Team size					
Sample	4	5	4	3	16
General	~6	~12	~30	~20	~70

In terms of contact, all teams employed a variety of means to stay connected with text messages, calls, emails, and video calls all being mixed. Nevertheless, teams still differed in the exact means they preferred. The most popular software for most communication hereby was MS Teams, with only one team primarily relying on Google Meet. Furthermore, teams reported different amounts of contact they

had with their team and leader, ranging from daily meetings to longer meetings once every two weeks. The details per team can be found in Table 3.

Table 3.

Overview of main contact within teams				
Contact	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4
Means	Video calls, calls, texts, Emails	Video calls, calls, Emails	Video calls, calls	Video Calls, Emails
Platform	MS Teams	Google Meet	MS Teams, Zoom	MS Teams
Frequency	Daily	Weekly	Weekly	Bi-weekly

Analysis

In order to analyze the collected data, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcription was done using the online software “Amberscript”. All transcripts were manually checked and corrected by the researcher afterward, to ensure that all information was correct.

Subsequently, all interview transcriptions were coded using ATLAS.ti. To make sense of the data, a grounded theory approach was used. During the first round of open coding, constant comparison between the data was used to gain a deeper understanding of data as well as roughly categorizing it (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The first round of open coding resulted in multiple codes which could be used to describe the data, in which relevant themes and topics emerged. These codes were grouped together to the first version of the codebook, which consisted of five categories and 21 codes. Another round of coding showed that not all relevant data was adequately described by the current codes, which made another round of open coding followed by a round of axial coding necessary. New codes were added to the codebook while others were grouped together to better explain the data. This ultimately resulted in a codebook consisting of six categories and 32 codes. Then, the interviews were coded according to the pre-defined codebook.

To ensure the validity of the study and results, a second coder was individually coding two interviews with a leader and three interviews with employees, which were then checked for intercoder reliability. This step was done to ensure that the codes are formulated clearly and are relevant (McHugh, 2012). The transcriptions were chosen based on whether there were no technical issues with the recording and whether the documents represented as many different teams as possible. The second coder received the general purpose of the study and was briefly informed about the procedure of the coding. Subsequently, the second coder received the codebook and was given the opportunity to ask

questions and provide feedback with regard to clarity and relevancy of the codes. Generally, no major issues arose but the description of some codes had to be adjusted for clarity or to differentiate between multiple codes better. The codebook which emerged from this analysis can be found in Appendix B.

After these clarifications, the second coder began coding. As soon as both coders were done coding the agreed-upon documents, the codes were checked for intercoder reliability by measuring the Cohens kappa. All scores were evaluated per category. A Cohens Cappa is deemed as an acceptable value if the score is above at least 0.61 and a strong value above 0.80 (McHugh, 2012). Only one of the scores falls short of being a strong value, yet it is still considered an acceptable value. Therefore all scores were deemed sufficient which then concluded the process for intercoder reliability. An overview of the intercoder reliability scores can be found in Table 4.

Table 4.

Results of intercoder reliability		
#	Category	Cohen's Kappa
1	Teleworking	0.84
2	Perception of relationship	0.95
3	Perception of professional isolation	0.89
4	Contact	0.78
5	Plans for improvement	1.00
6	E-leadership	0.92

Results

In order to present the results, the following paragraph will be divided into two parts: the dimensions and the dimensions per team. In the first part, an overview will be given over the dimensions which emerged through analysis and can be used to explain the relationship between leader and employee. A brief overview of the dimensions can be found in Table 5. Then, in the second part, the position of each team within these dimensions will be described in-depth. A more detailed overview of all the dimensions can be found in Appendix C.

Dimensions

Table 5.

Brief description of dimensions				
Side 1	1.	Description	2.	Side 2
Support	Support provided by leader e.g. in form of attention, open to feedback and finding solutions	Making decisions without consulting or taking into consideration employees and not being open to criticism		Demanding
Trust	The absence of control as well as having the freedom to make own decision	Lack of freedom over execution of tasks and time management as well as (nonverbal) obligations		Control
Proximity	The closeness of participants relationship to others	The perception of being disconnected from others		Distance
Leader Initiative	Initiative taken by the leader to organize activities as well as the perception of their general involvement	Initiative taken by employees to organize activities as well as their general involvement		Employee Initiative

Support vs. demanding.

This dimension describes the support provided in the relationship between employee and leader. Generally, support was perceived to be present when the participants felt like their leader was actively trying to find solutions for their problems, there was attention for personal wellbeing and a general feeling of the leader being present as well as being approachable. In addition to that, being open to feedback and considering criticism was seen as important. An example for this was given by Teleworker 3.1:

That is one of my agenda points for that meeting because she is also encouraging us to bring up this kind of ideas, especially if you're working in such a big team. You can not only be on her shoulders.

The relationship was perceived as demanding if decisions were made without consulting or taking the feelings and opinions of the participants involved into consideration. Also creating a mismatch between the offered solution and the needs of the participants was perceived negatively and added to the feeling of being commanded rather than asked. Additionally, if participants did not feel like they could openly voice their opinion or that this would not be valued, this would be seen as demanding.

Teleworker 2.4 gave an example of this: “er wordt dan niet aan mij gevraagd van nou, vind je dat wel een prettig idee” [No one is asking me whether I find this a good idea].

Trust vs. control.

The dimension of trust is often mentioned by participants in relation to the absence of control.

Teleworker 1.2 explained: “I feel like that is giving me a feeling of trust as well. If my boss were to constantly check on me how I was doing then I would have the suspicion that she thinks she as to intervene”. Participants felt trusted when they were free to make their own decisions regarding their projects as well as getting the freedom to execute tasks in creative ways. Additionally, being in charge of their own task- and time management was a prominent factor in feeling trusted by their leader.

On the contrary, control was perceived as the lack of freedom over the execution of tasks and time management as well as the inability to make choices with the regard to working from. In addition to that, employees reported that there are certain (non-verbal) obligations and expectations present at the workplace, which were non-negotiable and not always in line with the employee’s expectations and needs. Teleworker 4.1 described this: “You’re telling me you don’t have to go. Your choice, but what I feel is a different thing. So, it’s nonverbal kind of pressure and that is something that’s not recognized”. If the leader then was unwilling to compromise between their wants and their employees’ wants this was perceived as controlling.

Proximity vs. distance.

When talking about proximity, participants described the closeness of their relationship with others, often including its informal and personal nature. To describe the relationship with others, participants often described the activities that help them to stay connected to others and maintain their relationships, such as coffee moments and calls. Leader 3 offered an example of that:

You see and hear things from people that you didn’t know who has a dog, who’s sitting in the attic behind the washer over the next to the washing machine, who has like a nice sort of office at home, children. You see them walk by cats or, you know, go over the laptop or whatever.

Further, participants described the activities which they perceived as helpful for building and maintaining relationships at the workplace. Additionally, it helped participants to feel connected to others if it was easy to reach out to them.

This dimension described the participants’ feelings of being disconnected from their colleagues and leader. Frequently, this was described as the perception, that some people were keeping their distance in the online environment and therefore, disappearing nearly fully. This includes not being able to keep up with recent developments and work-related progress as well as increasingly

formal connections to others that previously had been of an informal nature. While not discussed directly, this further includes the feeling of being isolated from others. This dimension is illustrated by the statement of Teleworker 3.2:

I think now that we are working online, it's easier for some people to kind of disappear almost and to keep an eye on everyone and to have an idea of what's going on, which is I think it's different.

Leader initiative vs. employee initiative.

This dimension describes the ownership, or lack thereof, taken by the leader to organize activities and other relationship-building activities for their team, as well as their general involvement in the team.

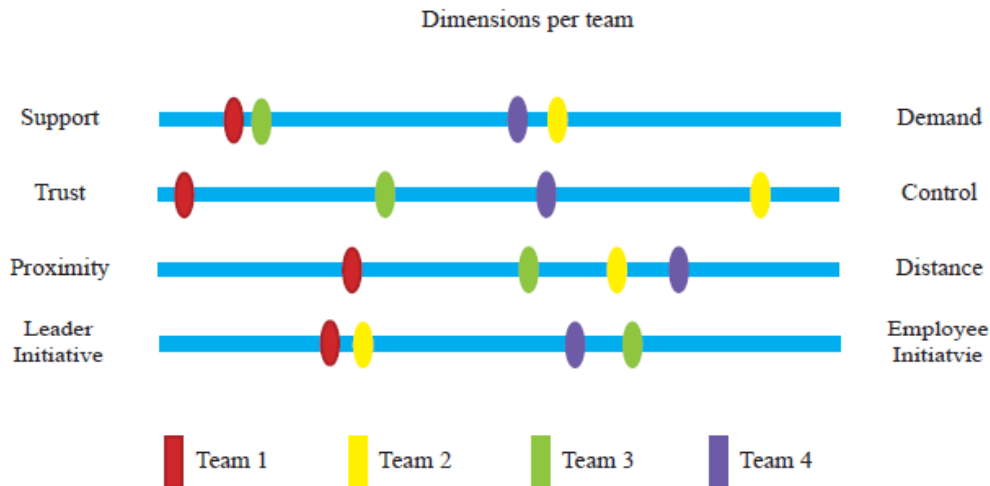
An example of this was given by Leader 2:

We had it once and we said we do it every week, but we didn't repeat it, but to me, that's my fault because then I didn't plan it again. And you see, I have to plan it, then it happens, the team members don't take it over.

The employees described the role they played in the organization and the realization of relationship-building activities with their team and leader, as well as their general involvement. Additionally, this dimension describes the initiative taken and willingness to organize activities, mostly of informal nature, to stay connected to their colleagues and leader, as well as their expectations of what should be organized. Teleworker 3.2 described that they, as a team, were responsible to organise certain events: "Well, the structure that we all already had in place was that the team was in charge of team-building exercises".

Dimensions per Team

Graph 1.



Team 1

Support vs demanding

Generally, the team felt very supported by their leader as well as by their fellow colleagues. The participants described that, while they did not always feel it was necessary to approach their leader for personal problems, their leader would be there for them if they did approach them as Teleworker 1.2 described: "It was mostly a matter of discipline, I don't know how my boss would have been able to discipline me from somewhere else in such a way". Teleworker 1.3 added to that: "And I haven't really had to discuss, like, emotional stuff or emotional well-being necessarily with her. And but I think she would have I would just assume that she would have the openness also from this compassionate".

Participants generally talked very positively about the relationship with their leader. One participant mentioned that they thought having some scheduled one-on-one time a week really "does help still to build that relationship just towards the boss" (Teleworker 1.1). Another participant described their leaders' approach to help them through the transition and find ways for them to work through it:

she really understood that our creativity is. Like harmed or a bit less present or easy to get if we're not all together and share ideas and she really put us at ease, that it's normal. So first, she acknowledged that it's normal to have like a reduced creativity and to be maybe less productive in terms of idea generation. So she acknowledged this. And she also set up, um, a

group like a meeting every week where we would exchange ideas that we saw on the news or topics or trends that we found interesting. (Teleworker 1.3)

In addition to that, this team did experience some discrepancies after a few months of working from home. They approached their leader about it and had a conversation to improve the feelings they had towards each other, which shows that they thought their leader was someone they can approach with their problems: “a few weeks ago we did have a confrontation because we could just feel that the entire vibe was just really down and we did confront our leader and the entire team actually just laid it out open” (Teleworker 1.1).

For these reasons, it can be said that this team generally feels supported by their leader in the online environment, even though they sometimes thought it was harder to reach out to their leader due to busy schedules and were afraid that their leader would possibly not see their message among all their unopened communications: “if I know that it is more difficult to get in touch with her I will find a way around it” (Teleworker 1.2).

Trust vs. control

This was the only team where people directly and voluntarily brought up the topic of trust with Teleworker 1.1 stating: “yes, I think to a certain extent, that she does really trust us”. When talking about the relationship with their leader, trust emerged as a relevant relationship characteristic between the employees and the leader. Generally, if there was a feeling of trust it enabled a more positive relationship with the leader. One participant especially linked their perception of trust to their leader giving them the freedom to work and make decisions by themselves without closely supervising every step: “I feel like that is giving me a feeling of trust as well. If my boss were to constantly check on me how I was doing then I would have the suspicion that she thinks she has to intervene” (Teleworker 1.2). So in a way, the lack of control was often seen as a sign of trust in this team. Another team member supported this by mentioning that they did feel that their leader was trusted them to a certain degree and further strengthened the link between freedom and trust:

I like the amount of responsibility that is on me now. It gives you the freedom of devising a plan, a freedom of actually arranging certain things and then you get the oversight that is more an advising role than someone who is completely incorporated in it. And that is nice because it boosts personal growth. (Teleworker 1.1)

However, in addition to that, the participant mentioned that it was still good to keep the leader involved in their tasks as they felt that “I can also imagine that from her point of view, that maybe she just thinks we are doing nothing because it is so silent” (Teleworker 1.1).

Proximity vs distance

The responses here were very mixed and include varying topics from what kind of relationship they would want at the workplace to how close or distanced they felt like they were. In the first team, it became very apparent that not all people were very sure whether they wanted a close relationship with their fellow colleagues and leader, as participant two stated: “This is still my first job and I am having a bit of a tough time deciding on where the line is between friends and colleagues”. Another employee mentioned while they appreciate getting along with their colleagues at the workplace and having a laugh with them, they did not need to spend any time with them in their free time (Teleworker 1.3). Teleworker 1.2 added: “Myself, I like to keep it very separated but I don’t know where I base that on. It is just my feeling of being a professional”. However, they also mentioned that they are the informal moments with their colleagues nevertheless and that a lot of their communication was already informal (Teleworker 1.2). Teleworker 1.2 felt the most strongly about too close contact with their colleagues and mentioned that they already felt like they knew their colleagues well enough and did not need many extra moments with them:

I think ties together well with what I said before about where to draw the line between a colleague and a friend, kind of. I wouldn’t mind but I feel like I know my colleagues to a decent level already and in my lunch break I would like to do something else than working if I know that the relationship with my colleagues is solid. If I would start in a company I would have the feeling like I would have to catch up or something and then I would definitely invest time in building this relationship. (Teleworker 1.2)

Generally, they mentioned that it is more difficult to emotionally connect with their team. Conversations online more easily become more formal and work-related, which makes it easier to overlook how people are doing on a personal level: “Chatting about how we're doing and also talking about personal development, during this covid time, I would have to admit, though, the work talk has hijacked most of our bilateral.” (Teleworker 1.3). Also, the leader of this team elaborated that due to their work of line, they usually grow a very tight bond in the office, which hasn’t happened the same way online. They further mentioned that the size of their team enables them to create a personal relationship with one another:

But I don't think that you could compare the social interactions of our team. I don't think you could compare it to the social interactions of a department that has one hundred and fifty people, a staff sitting in because within that you always have also the smaller groups that have interactions in those settings. (Leader 1)

Especially the team leader here finds it very important to be close to everyone in the team as opposed to some views of their employees. While their employees did not necessarily need a very close relationship they state that the company and their employees were like family:

So I treat it as my second home, so to speak. And my colleagues are my second family. So having social time and having a good social relationship with my team members is very important to me. But I can sense that to every team member is different in that way. Not everyone returns that favour, and I know that it's that this is what it's like, it's just how it works and how interactions are in a business setting or in a business environment. (Leader 1)

The leader further mentioned that they recognized their employees were not always very enthusiastic about spending time on team building activities, which they assumed also was due to the constant online environment:

But I have a feeling, you know, the response wasn't very enthusiastic, and I think the reason for this is that maybe people are still. Maybe there maybe everyone is just drawing that hard line between, OK, this is work time now and this is office time and colleagues are all this time. (Leader 1)

While all other teams mentioned that some people were just disappearing online, this was not the case in this team. So while the team is still having quite personal relationships with one another, there is still more distance between them than if they would be in the same office together.

Leader initiative vs. employee initiative

While most of the employees mentioned that they would like to occasionally have social online activities to build and maintain their relationship, they were relying on their leader to organize these. Teleworker 1.1 stated that they missed social moments together “But we also have a, for example, our leader's personal situation, she is like severely busy. So I think it is mostly up to us to just kind of push this through”. On the contrary, Teleworker 1.3 stated that while they personally were excited for social activities such as drinks or online games, they did not take the initiative to organize them: “I also don't take ownership of these things, so I get like it's not happening because it's not for me.”. They further explained that these ideas had been raised multiple times by their leader, but plans never followed through: “But so this was raised and I think my colleague was looking into it and it never materialized” (Teleworker 1.3).

Also, the leader mentioned that they suggested playing a game but then never followed through with it: “And when it comes to planning stuff online, I even suggested maybe we should start playing online games like among us or something to see if we get to see if we could grow a be closer maybe.” (Leader 1). They further elaborated, however, that they also found it important not to pressure their employees too much:

This also raised expectations. So that's why I'm also very aware of the fact that and why I try to respect their personal time as much as possible, not invade them and try to do more within a

team setting, because what is important to me is not necessarily privately and of importance to others. (Leader 1)

Generally, they recognized that not all team members expected the same thing from the workplace interactions:

This but aside from the different personalities at this firm, I think we're a very diverse team. You always have the people who are very much into this kind of thing. And then there are people who are not into this kind of thing at all. And then there are the people who are all, you know, to whom it's all the same in the middle because you think, you know, whatever works out, we can make it work for me. (Leader 1)

Team 2

Support vs demand

The second team was more divided in the support they felt from their leader. On the one hand, participants described that when they struggled, their leader tried to talk them through it and find ways structure the work processes differently, so that they would find their balance again. An example of this was provided by Teleworker 2.2: “Oh, I think so. So far, so good, because. I didn't have personal problems, but work-related problems, I always message her, I'll call her and then if she's too busy, then she'll call me back.”. On the other hand, participants felt that it was difficult to bring arising problems up to their leader due to their busy schedule. In addition to that, one participant stated that bringing up their concerns and problems were not always valued much or taken seriously, as tasks had to be done the leader's way: “er wordt dan niet aan mij gevraagd van nou, vind je dat wel prettig idee” [No one is asking me whether I find this a good idea] (Teleworker 2.4). Additionally, they added:

Ja, je doet het is rare tijden je wil extra dingen doen voor je werkgever. Maar dan Mag dat ook wel een beetje terugkomen in waardering voor de vrije tijd die je hebt of wilt nemen, want als ik nu een vrije dag wil opnemen, dan moet ik zorgen dat mijn planning wel helemaal passend verloopt. [Yes, in these weird times, you do want to do extra things for your employer. But then they could also show some appreciation in free time that I have or want to take, because now if I try to take a day off it has to fit the planning perfectly] (Teleworker 2.4)

This was also recognized by Teleworker 2.2 who explained: “Sometimes we have to call on my off days because it was sort of emergency situation. And I used to work as well during those days, like Friday and stuff”. In other words, the leader demanded a lot from their employees without replicating the benefit towards the employee. This team, therefore, is more in the middle of the dimension, with some participants leaning towards the feeling supported whereas others feel like the leader is more demanding.

Trust vs control

In the second team, neither control nor trust was discussed a lot. Nevertheless, one participant talked about the restrictions of own choices they could make with regard to task division, execution, and choice of work venue. They explained that: “nu wordt er heel veel verdeeld. Al van tevoren. En daardoor is overleg gewoon niet meer mogelijk of tenminste niet zo snel.” [Now, a lot is already being divided beforehand which makes it difficult or simply impossible to negotiate] (Teleworker 2.4). They further mentioned that it was not always easy to deter from the previously laid down structure: “Niet altijd, nee, niet. Dat wordt niet altijd gewaardeerd. Als je dingen door moet schuiven, dan wordt echt inderdaad heel streng in overleg. Ja, of ik moet gewoon inderdaad maar extra extra uren maken.” [Not always, no. That is not always appreciated. If I want to shift things around, it is only possible in very strict negotiation, or I will just have to make some extra hours] (Teleworker 2.4).

The leader of this team explained that due to the distance they had to exert more control and let their employees lay out their tasks more transparent, as it was a lot harder to check peoples progress online: “So we have to be more strict. And everybody everyone has to be transparent as possible online in the tools that we have, about what they are doing, and we have to be very aware of” (Leader 2). In addition to that, the leader of that team (Leader 9) implied that the employees were trusted to finish their tasks in a timely manner and if they would not be able to, get in touch with the leader.

So the balance and meaning of trust were very different in this team than in others, with both parties (employees and leader) perceiving the same subject very differently.

Proximity vs distance

In the second team, most statements highlighted the distance created by the online environment, which was especially noticeable since only half of the team also worked physically together. They often stated that the team on another location was not as involved and that they weren't as familiar with them, as they have only ever met them physically once. Participants noticed that the communication with the team at the other location was inherently more formal: “To them, I only speak work, work-related, sometimes a little bit, but mostly work-related. So I think that's really different than the colleagues I work with here because I hear about their private life more” (Teleworker 2.1).

Furthermore, participants were wary about building and maintaining a relationship with others in a completely online environment with one participant clearly stating “Well, no, I don't think you get the same relationship if you talk all the time online” (Teleworker 2.1). One of the points that was brought up was that having contact merely via online means did not work well for creating a bond between the different team members (Leader 2). The leader mentioned that while they tried to set up informal activities such as online lunches, it was hard to create a personal bond:

Yes, of course. But you then with 8 people, so you are not really discussing really private things. But, yeah, you can ask how it's going with these driving lessons. And then and then everyone is interested and yeah, we have fun. Yeah. So it's OK to do it but it's not a complete replacement. (Leader 2)

In addition to that, Teleworker 2.3 explained that some people are just naturally more distant, which gets amplified more in the online environment: “Well, we did it once and it was we did it once, we tried to do it more often, but yet there are people who are more in the background”.

They further did not go much into depth about how close their relationships at the workplace were but more that it was not always easy to reach out to their leader, due to them being too busy, which complicated the line of communication between them. Teleworker 2.2 stated that they wished their leader would be a little bit less busy, also to make it easier to reach out to them.

Leader initiative vs. employee initiative

In this team, only the leader talked about their own initiative and that social activities were not happening unless they took ownership of it:

We had it once and we said we do it every week, but we didn't repeat it, but to me, that's my fault because then I didn't plan it again. And you see, I have to plan it, then it happens. The team members don't take it over. So, um. Yeah, and if I don't plan it, it's not happening, I think. (Leader 2)

Teleworker 2.3 was further talking about the employee association which regularly organizes activities for the entire company, which they joined occasionally. They mentioned that since it was on a voluntary basis, not everyone was always present or active but that it was a nice way to keep in touch with members of other teams.

Team 3

Support vs. Demanding

The third team was generally talking very positively about the relationship with their leader, however, often more in an indirect way. While their description of support showed more through actions and statements than the actual perception of being there for one, this was also much appreciated but some of it suffered due to unavailability by the leader, as in other teams.

As an example, one participant mentioned that their leader paid good attention to receiving the informal information/signals about their employees and well being, meaning that they cared and tried, in their own way, to see whether anyone needed some additional support: “you know if they're doing well, like trying to get these informal signals, I think it's quite good. And if there's any feedback from

the team, I also feel that there's room for that and that's being considered actively" (Teleworker 3.2). The same participant mentioned that if they ever needed support they were sure their leader would be there for them: "So also if it's after hours or something, I'm sure she would be available in urgent situations."

The leader themselves mentioned that they tried their best to always be there for their employees:

But I'm a very much a people person and a people manager. I strongly believe that if people are not in good shape, that you can ask them anything, but, you know, they can't perform. So it's very important to watch after them and to give them the good content and to give them. And is this mainly I believe this is the most important, because if they don't feel OK and they won't perform so. [...] and do like creative things like brainstorming so that people still like their jobs. (Leader 3)

What was unique about the dynamic of the relationship between the leader and their employees was that the support was going both ways: "That is one of my agenda points for that meeting because she is also encouraging us to bring up these kind of ideas, especially if you're working in such a big team. You can not only be on her shoulders." (Teleworker 3.1). The members of this team were also committed to helping their leader and recognized that their leader's job of keeping them all happy was not an easy one. They recognized that one leader could not really take care of all their employees and mentioned:

I think a leader should never be alone with this. She can also I think she knows very good. Who to talk to about these kind of things. If she knows OK, from that team, if I talk to her and say, hey, try to get your team to talk about these things, that helps. Then she doesn't have to do it all. But there will be different people on different groups and sometimes who will do the same. (Teleworker 3.1)

The leader further also recognized and confirmed this: "I think in general that everybody is more aware of their role in looking after each other, in Dutch we say collegialiteit [collegiality] so that as colleagues, you like you care for each other and you watch after each other" (Leader 3).

Trust vs. control

In the third team, trust was often discussed more indirectly and like in the first team, linked to the perceived freedom to be creative and find new ways of executing projects in an online environment. They described that, having to work from home, allowed them to try out different ways of executing and organizing their tasks and that their leaders trusted them enough to do this. In addition to that, trust was linked with responsibility. Participant 6 elaborated that due to experience they knew how the work environment functioned and what they could act on:

You know your own responsibility. I know what I can do and what I can decide on my own and where I need her and if I need her, then I call her and then I need I will get what I need”. So, inherently, the perceived control by the leader may also be linked to how secure an individual feels in their job position. (Teleworker 3.1)

They further mentioned that due to the big size of the team, it also would not be possible to control everyone a lot, wherefore they were relying more on senior employees and sub-teams to organize themselves (Leader 3). Naturally, this disabled the natural “threat” of control and gave participants more freedom to work freely. Participant 6 explained:

But that also means that we have to experiment more. We have to reinvent things. And that, I think, is fun to have a look at the normally regular project we always did and look at it and say, hey, how can we do this differently?

Proximity vs. distance

This team prominently discussed their perception that some people were disappearing in the online environment, hence, that there was a lot of distance between some members: “but it just it feels like there's a distance between people, of course. So personally, I would say that video calling, although you might see someone, feels less personal than calling someone on the phone somehow.” (Teleworker 3.2).

This was either because they are naturally having a quieter personality or because they have trouble adjusting to the online environment as Teleworker 3.2 described “I think now that we are working online, it's easier for some people to kind of disappear almost and to keep an eye on everyone and to have an idea of what's going on, which is I think it's different.”

Leader 3 added to that:

I also have colleagues who I never see anymore. So who disappeared, It's maybe a little bit too much, but, yeah, you don't hear and don't see them that much. You don't have meetings with them. And that's yeah. I don't know what all my colleagues are doing when.

Teleworker 3.3 added to that: “now I try to combine it a bit more so that we know better from each other what we are doing”. On the contrary, one participant stated that sometimes not being so close to others also had its benefits:

sometimes it's good to be isolated. If you want to focus on something and you really need to get things done, you can say, OK, I'm going offline or I will put on the do not disturb button, and then I can really focus on things. (Teleworker 3.1)

One participant even described that the distance between employees and the aspect of not talking to other individuals often made them feel isolated: “sometimes if you don't talk to someone the entire day that you're kind of like, am I by myself? Um, what am I working towards? You know, this is kind of existential questions that you might start asking yourself” (Teleworker 3.2).

However, next to discussing the distance between them, simultaneously participants described that the close contacts they did have, had become more personal. Leader 3 explained:

Of course we had, but we had times that we had a good laugh and you see people at home as well. So that's also quite a nice thing. You see and hear things from people that you didn't know who has a dog, who's sitting in the attic behind the washer over the next to the washing machine, who has like a nice sort of office at home, children. You see them walk by cats or, you know, go over the laptop or whatever. So that also brings fun and a laugh.

Also, Teleworker 3.1 shared this perception of personal communication in an online environment:

The backgrounds, the books or the games or whatever, and you can talk about it, Yeah, I think, you are, in a different room. What do you do that you will take the room or did you just renovate or what?

Leader initiative vs. employee initiative

In this team, the focus was generally more on the different sub-teams within the team, which can largely be explained by the size of the team. They generally talked less about activities that had to be organized but were more focused on team structure as well as informal activities organized within sub-teams, which were not mentioned to be the responsibility of the leader. Teleworker 3.1 mentioned that in order to stay organized, the teams adjusted organically to the new environment: “we do have that project leader or we do have the senior marketer or whatever, but it's it's more of a natural way that it grew that way”. To add to the previous mention of employees organizing their own activities, Teleworker 3.2 mentioned:

With some colleagues that I used to hang out with, I would say at work the most, I tried to schedule these informal moments, um, like half an hour somewhere in between and not in a very structured way, always per se. And sometimes that happens after like a formal moment or after kind of an online team-building event that people just stick around.

Also, the team leader added that they found it difficult to keep track of all their employees and therefore were leaning more on their senior employees:

The good thing is that, like in an organic way, now I lean more on the senior people in my team. So they sort of take on, like organically a more senior role as well. So they are sort of

the juniors. So when I speak to them and I think everything is OK. And, you know, have you been in touch with, you know, other names, then? I sort of know what's happening. (Leader 3)

Team 4

Support vs demand

This team was very mixed in their responses and based on their statements, it seems that the interviews that were done might not be the most representative for the entire team. First and foremost, also in this team, the leader mentioned that they were receiving support from their team:

In fact, I don't know that, but I got like during the autumn holidays, a few signals from my colleague management team that a few of my colleagues in my team were worried about me. And, well, I could understand because I was not responding to emails because my email box was too large. (Leader 4)

They further admitted that during the previous months they did not always give as much support to their employees as they would have wanted to: "And I hope now everybody gets the feeling again that I'm there for them. But unfortunately, the past well, six months or so, it hasn't been the case that I was there for them."

On the opposite side, one employee was criticizing their leader's approach to supporting their employees: "Yes, I can always contact my team leader, but that doesn't mean That it gives me a solution." (Teleworker 4.1). On the other hand, they mentioned that they could see that their leader was trying their hardest, but that due to personality differences, they did not always see eye to eye.

Trust vs control

In team four, neither control nor trust was openly discussed by more than one employee. However, the employee who does talk about it focuses a lot on the obligations and pressure to not only work from the office but also to execute tasks in a certain way:

But it's no, you're not obliged to go, to come. No, but. I know, I know you, you. You're telling me you don't have to go. Your choice, but what I feel is a different thing. So, it's a nonverbal kind of pressure and that is something that's not recognized. (Teleworker 4.1)

In relation to the tasks, they mostly wished for more freedom to make their own choices and that there should be more trust in the employee to choose what is right: "And trust the individual to make sensible choices, to leave it be."

Proximity vs. distance

Also in team four, the main focus had been on the increasing distance due to the lack of knowledge of what people were doing and anxiety about being forgotten. People described the feeling that some of their colleagues were disappearing in a way rather often. Especially for employees that already had (physical) distance to the team due to e.g. living further away beforehand, those feelings just increased in the online environment: “Yeah, I guess so. I know at least sometimes, uh, that I do feel it. I, uh, that I'm not sure if people notice what I'm doing, if, uh, they don't forget that I'm still there” (Teleworker 4.2). Also, the team leader recognized that some people were growing apart from the team: “You get at a distance from each other. So you're not as close to one another as you used to be. And for the relationship, it's yeah. I think it's getting less intense than it was before.” (Leader 4).

In Addition to that, Teleworker 4.1 described it as difficult to be engaged and build personal contact in big online meetings, also due to personality:

And that works because then it's just five or six or four of us. And then we're going to there is some interaction and we are listening to each other and we laugh. And then it's just like a normal conversation. But once you tip over to 10 persons or six persons, then, well, I am not that engaged as I would like to be.

While being less concrete about it, Teleworker 4.2 agreed that big online meetings made it difficult to be personal “I wouldn't know In what way or something, because, uh, if you organize a big teams meeting as a leader of the team and invite everyone, then it already feels like a formal meeting again”.

As opposed to team 3, where participants found it nice and refreshing to get some personal insights into their colleagues' life by seeing their backgrounds, one participant did not agree with that:

I've spoken to you twice or something, and then I have to talk about your cat seriously. I cannot talk about your cat because I don't know you. I don't like cats anyway. But that's so that's a bit to me, it feels a bit forced to do something like that. (Teleworker 4.1)

Additionally, also in this team, the closeness of the team suffered from the longer communication lines and the business of their leader. This made it more difficult to reach out and stay in touch which inherently decreases the tightness of the relationship with others. Teleworker 4.1 stated: “you do miss some sense of togetherness”.

Leader initiative vs. employee initiative

This team did not discuss relationship-building activities or whose initiative that should be much. Nevertheless, the comments given with relation to this dimension focused on the sub-teams rather than the entire team, also due to the size of the team. As the leader was not equally involved in all sub-teams, the employees have to take their own initiative to organize social activities. When talking about social activities most participants rather talked about small get together with few colleagues they

befriended prior to working from home.

In addition to that, Teleworker 4.2 elaborated on a platform he was working on, to increase the normal day-to-day contact and bring spontaneity back into the workplace:

That I start my day with logging in to that online office where you have an avatar that can walk around and hopefully other colleagues join as well. Uh, so you can I can just walk towards someone to ask a question and then walk back to your own desk, uh, just to get the spontaneous meetings back. (Teleworker 4.2)

Discussion

Main Findings

This study aimed to provide insights into how leaders enact a meaningful relationship with their employees in an online environment and how teleworkers and leaders experience this relationship. It could be seen that multiple factors influence the way that people perceive the relationships at their workplace. Nevertheless, through analysis, several prominent scales emerged which participants used to describe their relationship. These scales were translated into the four dimensions support vs demand, proximity vs. distance, trust vs. control, and leader initiative vs. employee initiative.

Taking a step back from the proposed dimensions makes it clear that they are not always easy to separate from one another but rather appear in clusters. In the following, these relations will be further explored. Firstly, the dimension of support was partially defined as feeling as if one can easily approach their leader. This further, to a degree overlaps with the dimension of distance. It was mentioned by various participants of various teams, that their leaders were too busy which made it difficult to contact them, thus, created a distance between them but also made participants feel as if they could not receive the support they needed. This made it difficult to keep these dimensions apart on some occasions, as employees who cannot reach their leader because they are too busy also cannot reach out to ask for help.

Secondly, the dimensions of demand and control overlap, as both dimensions deal with unpleasant requirements imposed by the leader. Throughout the analysis, it proved to be challenging to find the right category for some statements as they were deemed controlling as well as demanding. Obligations, verbal or nonverbal, were both described to be a factor used to control the employees but often also came across as demanding (best seen in Team 2 and 4).

Thirdly, support and initiative were overlapping in a few of the teams. It was not always clear whether an activity organized by the leader to help the employees combat their decreased creativity was primarily counting to support or as an example that they showed initiative to actually organize something for their employees. This was generally problematic as actions, whether being positive

actions or more enforcing distance, could fall under multiple categories depending on what one emphasizes.

Participants mentioned several elements and factors which helped them to build and maintain a meaningful relationship with their leader. Generally, leaders that showed support for their employees, were solution-oriented, and trusted their employees elicited a positive reaction to the relationship with their employees. Participants described that their leader does not necessarily need to directly ask every individual if they were doing okay but that it was also recognized as showing support when they were getting these signals informally or through other employees. Overall, it could be seen that the perception of trust often stemmed from the absence of control as well as being able to take own responsibility for projects and get the freedom to execute tasks creatively. This was further also considered to boost personal growth. Generally, participants stated that sometimes just a simple message acknowledging the work done can help them feel less isolated and appreciated at the workplace. On the other hand, one of the leaders described that they felt they expressed their trust for their employees by relying on the employee to come to them with their problems rather than checking in all the time. They argued for this by saying that with bigger teams it is simply not possible to check in on their employees one-on-one regularly. Further, it was pointed out that perceived control may be linked to how secure the individual feels at their job. A leader also mentioned that it was important to generally have a good team atmosphere where everyone is watching out for each other. Moreover, participants did think that regular one-on-one talks with the leader were helping them maintain their relationship. In some teams, the relationship between employees and leader was so meaningful, that the employees showed concern for the well-being of their leader and tried to help their leader as much as they could. This also especially in the bigger teams led to employees naturally becoming more self-sufficient and organizing their own get-togethers. Lastly, some participants described that they felt the online environment helped build a more personal connection in some cases, as the background that becomes visible during video calls gives input for personal questions and gives an insight into people's private life. In some cases, leaders started relying more on their senior employees, which was also often seen as a sign of trust.

The relationship was experienced negatively if the leader was demanding, exerting control, and distant. Multiple participants said they felt that online communication was inherently less personal and more formal, making it more difficult to build and maintain a meaningful relationship, especially if the call included more than a certain number of people. In nearly all teams, employees discussed their leaders' overflowing schedule as a hindrance to being able to build good relationships. Leaders which are always unavailable and thus harder to reach, involuntarily create a barrier in which employees are less likely to reach out to them or even doubt their leader will even notice their message. Further, participants experienced the online environment created a distance between people and that some people were simply disappearing and therefore hard to reach out to. This distance also came along with a feeling of isolation in which participants described that they were not always sure

whether their team members did not forget about them or knew what they were doing in the first place. Additionally, if the leader is enforcing ways of working that did not fit the approach of the employee this causes the relationship to decrease. This includes not being able to make choices about own time and task management as well as not getting the freedom to execute tasks in a more unconventional way. Also, few participants mentioned that even though they feel like they can contact their leader for anything, this does not mean that it will give them a solution if their leader is unwilling to compromise. Participants also mentioned that there were a lot of nonverbal obligations and pressures which were not always negotiable which are perceived as controlling and harm the relationship.

Mentioned frequently among various teams was the impact their team size had on the interactions at the workplace. In the smaller teams, it was generally easier for leaders to maintain a good relationship with their employees, as they could plan regular personal conversations with each employee individually. This was not possible within the bigger teams as the sole task of the leader would then be to communicate with the employees. Further, it was easier for people in bigger teams to disappear. Also, leaders of the bigger teams mentioned that it was less possible for them to exert control on the individual, as also for this their team was just too big. Individually controlling and overseeing everyone's tasks at all times was just too time-consuming which naturally gave their employees more opportunities to organize themselves.

Another point that could be observed frequently was that whether someone experienced an action as controlling/demanding or as support/trust often depended on the individual's personality rather than on objective reasoning. This also seems to lead to members from the same team describing their perceptions with regard to their leader very differently. It seems that some participants generally have a different experience or at least recollection of incidents, sometimes even about rather objective actions such as whether informal activities are being organized. This is further why the solutions provided by the leader may not be solutions that necessarily help the employee. The kind of relationship with the leader that was desirable for the employee changed based on personality traits and affected the way that employees experienced the relationship with their leader.

Theoretical Implications

This research contributes to and confirms prior work in several ways. First and foremost, this research provides a new way of categorizing, organizing, and displaying the relationship between e-leader and teleworker by describing it within the proposed dimensions, which to the researcher's knowledge has not been done in prior work. The dimensions show that the relationship can be fluid rather than statically build upon characteristics, thus creating the possibility of moving within the dimensions as well as allowing for describing the relationship in more than just black and white terms.

Secondly, this research builds on the LMX which has been frequently cited in leadership research by further deepening the understanding of how relationships between leaders and members

are build at the workplace. As Yang et al. (2020) already suggested, this research further confirms that in a dyadic exchange both parties constantly reevaluate the cost and benefit of a relationship, with individuals suggesting that the energy they put into the workplace also should result in benefits for them and that the neglect to even out the benefit negatively influences the relationship between them. This further raises the question of whether individuals receive lesser benefits because the relationship is bad or whether the relationship is bad because individuals are granted fewer benefits and how this influences each other. In literature it has further been argued that trust and a high-quality LMX are formed through reciprocity, further underlining that the sides may mutually influence each other (Breevart et al., 2015; De Vries et al. 2019). As Breevart et al. (2015) mentioned, part of the benefits granted because of a high-quality LMX may involve the freedom to choose and execute tasks freely which might explain why teleworkers under the same have different experiences. In this study, it could be seen that this lack of freedom was often seen as controlling and a lack of trust by participants which could hint towards them having a low-quality LMX and therefore not receiving this freedom to make their own choices. Normally, the sheer possibility to work remotely is seen as a sign of trust and high-quality LMX (Collins et al., 2016) as leaders would only allow this option for employees they were willing to grant benefits for. However, now due to COVID-19, everyone was forced to work from home regardless of their relationship with their leader, thus making the assumption of high-quality LMX invalid. This however opens room to the question of whether the team that shifted to working from the office part-time as soon as possible has generally a lower quality LMX and made the shift because the leaders did not trust their employees to fulfill their work adequately. Through literature, it became apparent that it is not fully established whether video-calling and face-to-face interaction are interchangeable (Coenen & Kok, 2014). At least with regard to this study, multiple participants stated that they thought solely communicating through virtual channels was never going to result in the same kind of connection as a physical meeting, which hints that video-calling may not be enough to grow a substantiated relationship. Finally, authors have argued that a high-quality LMX can also simply grow over time rather than through explicit efforts and then lead to enhanced career possibilities (Hooper & Martin, 2008; Park et al., 2015). With the change to the online environment, some leaders stated that they were relying more on their senior employees now and that they more or less organically became leaders of smaller sub-teams, which supports the notion made in previous literature.

Thirdly, the implications provided by Cooper and Kurland (2002) that the professional development fostered through everyday activities may be hindered, seems to further be confirmed by this research. Even though all employees are equally isolated from one another, as opposed to most research on teleworking where only a few individuals work from home, it still seems to obstruct the lines of communication, making it harder to get information through informal activities. However, not all teams have been talking about missing out on professional development due to working from home. In the one team that did talk about it, it seemed like mostly the leader was very concerned about it, which may hint that the worry about professional development may not be in the foreground as

much for the employees and might only become an influencing factor when the leader is giving obvious signals about it. Generally, it seems as if teleworkers are more concerned about their social isolation rather than professional isolation whereas leaders seem to focus on the impact the social isolation has on professional isolation.

Fourth, Collins et al. (2016) suggest in their research that the online environment may even help to build a more personal relationship with the employees due to seeing them in their private space. This was confirmed by multiple people participating in this study, who mentioned that the background gives them a better insight into how a person lives and what that may say about their private life, as well as providing conversation starters, which make it easier to include some informal questions. Whether this personal insight into leader's and colleagues life is also wanted and appreciated however has shown to be dependent on personality.

Practical Implications

There are several ways how a leader can move within the dimensions and therefore build a more meaningful relationship with their employees.

In order to enact a meaningful relationship between e-leader and teleworker, it may be necessary to re-think the role a leader is playing, especially in bigger-sized teams. Among all teams, it was mentioned that the leader had a too-busy schedule to properly look after their employees. In smaller teams there were still one-on-one meetings possible to schedule, as they were specifically incorporated into the workflow, however, this falls away in bigger teams. While the bigger teams tend to re-organize themselves to be more proactive, it might help to restructure the role of the leader in such teams as a whole. Leaders need to become more accessible, which means fewer responsibilities and fewer employees to supervise. It may be necessary to completely move away from organization-related tasks to purely being there for their employees. On the other hand, executing normal everyday tasks was also appreciated by employees.

Additionally, trying to bring more spontaneous possibilities back into the online environment, in which teleworkers can contact their leader without having to schedule an appointment in advance may be valuable. As participants often complained about the lack of spontaneity as well as not being able to easily approach their leader, planning virtual drop-in hours may offer a solution. If leaders were to schedule each day an hour where they are available for spontaneous questions, this may offer a valuable solution for their employees and make them feel like their leader is present and is offering the support they need.

Also when it comes to social activities, leaders of a small team need to pay attention to getting their employees involved. Especially in the smaller teams, employees were seeking social activities without taking the responsibility to organize them. Leaders need to become more proactive in organizing social moments for and with the team or make sure to appoint someone else who does as

these moments are crucial to build and maintain personal relationships at the workplace.

Further, leaders may want to take a step back and look at what their employees need on an individual level. There may not be a one-size-fits-all solution and when pushed through by the leader may harm their relationship with their employees. Leaders need to become more conscious about the decisions they make for their employees and how that affects their work satisfaction. Especially with the aspect of an ongoing worldwide pandemic, it is crucial that leaders pay more attention to which arrangements their employees are comfortable with rather than demanding something which potentially affects the health of their employees or those around them.

Additionally, it is easy to get stuck in traditional ways of working, while many employees enjoyed the creativity that having to work from home brought along with it, offering chances that many would have never dared to explore beforehand. This suggests that there may be a need for more input from the employees and creative spaces and activities to explore ideas.

Limitations and Future Research

This study provides many new and interesting insights on a topic that has not yet been sufficiently explored and due to the ongoing pandemic is more relevant than ever before. Due to its newly gained relevancy, it is crucial to properly evaluate the outcomes and execution of the research.

First of all, the study was initially supposed to employ the CIT method to get a deeper understanding of the actions that influence the relationship between the leader and the employee. This was difficult to implement due to the limited time of the interviews. Many of the participants were rather talkative and elaborated extensively on the probing questions, which in itself resulted in very informative information as well as frequently including examples. These examples were then used to continue the conversation. However, this opens up a great opportunity for future research. Further studies may want to explore the outcomes of this study more in-depth while making use of the critical incident technique to get a more substantiated confirmation. Especially the extremely sensitive topics as professional isolation could be explored further in longer interviews which allow for better bonding between the interviewer and interviewee.

Secondly, due to technical difficulties, the voice of the interviewer is not included in all the recordings of the interviews. This ultimately made it harder to make sense of all statements in the analysis of the interviews. Nevertheless, since the analysis and the interviews were conducted by the same person, this did not affect the analysis tremendously and where necessary the researcher tried to add the missing information by hand. However, this meant that for testing the intercoder reliability, interviews had to be chosen where the voice of both the interviewer and the interviewee was audible which limited the choice of interviews. Nevertheless, there were enough representable and high-quality interviews available to choose from.

Third, during analysis, it became apparent that the dimensions are not always clearly separable

but rather form clusters which in some cases made it hard to clearly distinguish between them. This is not fully surprising when taking into consideration that these dimensions emerged from analysis rather than literature. Other researchers may want to further distinguish and establish these dimensions as well as the clusters within them and potentially exploring dimensions not taken into consideration in this study in future research. This could shed even deeper insights into the relationships formed at work and help leaders understand how to move within these dimensions better and improve their relationships.

Fourth, this research focussed mainly on the professional isolation as well as the well-being of the employee. Throughout the data collection, it became apparent that this may be a too limited point of view. In at least two of the teams' employees directly expressed a concern for their leaders' well-being and in one other they mentioned that they could not only rely on their leader but be there for them too in a healthy work environment. This perception was not taken into consideration beforehand but potentially illustrates new points of the relationship between leader and employee. Therefore, further investigation into the well-being of leaders and how this affects the dynamics and relationship of the workplace may be needed.

Fifth, the focus of this research was on the direct relationship between employee and leader as well as the tangible things that influence this relationship. However, it has come to the attention of the researcher that in some cases the underlying or nonverbal social or professional obligations put in place either by the workplace or by society as a whole about what the relationship is supposed to be like may influence the general relationship. People may act on things because they are social convention rather than their own personal preference. This was beyond the scope of this research as time did not allow for a more thorough investigation into this, however, it opens up room for future research. There, where the personality of employees does not match the obligation set by the leader, it may cause harm to the relationship and overall comfort level at the workplace.

Conclusion

This research was conducted to explore the way that leaders and employees perceive their relationship in a virtual environment and how this affects their feeling of professional isolation and their connection to one another. The way that teleworkers and e-leaders experience relationships at the workplace depends on many factors, of which personality traits, as well as expectations of the relationship, seem to play a big role. Leaders who show their support and trust towards their employees and generally have a personal and close relationship with their employees, by being available and visible, help enacting a meaningful relationship with their teleworkers. On the other hand, making demands and controlling teleworkers hampers the relationship and drives employees to seek support from their colleagues rather than their leader, which further creates a distance between them. This research offers an important insight into a topic that has recently gained new importance

and shines a light on the actions and behaviours of e-leaders which influence their relationships with their employees' and offers suggestions on how to move forward.

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Appendix A: Questions for the interviews with employees

General questions

- Demographic questions
 - o Age
 - o Gender
- Workplace
 - o Which sector does your workplace operate in?
 - o How many years have you worked at your current workplace?
 - o Do you always work at home or also at remote locations (such as cafes, teleworking offices, etc)?
 - o How big is your work team?
 - Do they all work remotely?
 - How often do you have contact with them?

Leadership

- What makes a good leader?
- Does this perception change in the current situation? If yes, what changes?
- How do you think your leader performs with regard to the previous two questions?
- What do you experience as helpful behaviour of your supervisor?
- What would you like to see more? What are you missing?
- How would you describe the relationship with your supervisor?

Contact

- Describe a typical contact moment with your leader
- What is the contact you ave with your supervisor usually about?
- How often do you have contact with your supervisor?
- Do you notice any differences to how it was before? If yes, what has changed?

Professional isolation

- Do you feel like your isolated from the rest of your team?
- Would you say that the work related contacts you have have changed? If yes, how so?
 - o How does this make you feel?
- What do you miss most with regard to social professional contacts?
- What activities help you to not feel isolated from others?
- How can your supervisor help you with feelings of isolations? What do you need from them?
- Has it become more difficult to approach your leader with problems you encounter?

Questions for the interviews with the leader

General questions:

- Demographic questions
 - o Age
 - o Gender
- Workplace
 - o Which sector does your workplace operate in?
 - o How many years have you worked at your current workplace?
 - How many of those years have you been in a leadership position?
 - o Do you also work remotely or from the office?
 - o How many people are you supervising?
 - Do they all work remotely?

Leadership

- What makes a good leader?
- Does you think this changes in the current situation? If yes, what about it?
- What is the biggest challenge for a leader in such a time?
 - o How do you deal with it?
- In your opinion, will this crisis change what leadership means and entails?
 - o How so?
- What can leaders learn from the current situation?

Contact

- How often do you have contact with the people you supervise?
- Can you describe how a typical contact moment with your team usually looks?
- What has changed about having contact with your team?
- What is going better, what is missing?
- Do you feel like the situation brings your team closer together or further apart?

Professional isolation

- Would you say that the contact you have with your team is becoming less personal?
- Is it still possible to know what is going on in your teams life?
 - o What actions do you take to make sure you know what is going on in your teams life?
- How do you prevent your team members to become isolated?
- Would you say that the work related contacts you have have changed? If yes, how so?
 - o How does this make you feel?

Appendix B: Codebook

Category	Code	Subcodes	Definition	Example
Teleworking	Perception of teleworking		The individual describes in general terms what working at home is like without attaching an opinion to it	"to be honest, the home office here isn't too bad so I would probably prefer a mix of both. So maybe 3 office days and 2 stay at home days or the other way around but it is nice to actually see your colleagues and to be able to approach them right away"
		Positive	A positive outcome from working at home	"I am pleasantly surprised by how quickly everyone was able to adapt to an online environment."
		Negative	A negative outcome from working at home	"But it has it has been exhausting. I think it's been the online time has definitely almost doubled, I think."
		Neutral	Neither a positive nor negative outcome from working at home or the individual describes the experience as mixed, so including both positive and negative aspects	"Actually, it feels for me pretty normal already because I do it for several years"
	Office vs Home office		The individual describes a difference between working physically at the office and working from home or how the situation now differs from their normal work-experience at the company prior to working from home	"some people just need to go to the office to do work. And at home they have a lot of distraction"
	Work-Life balance		The individual describes how working from home affects their work-life balance	"but the work basically never stops. So we're always we're always working. for me when we close the door at the end of end of the day, it continues."
	Advantage of home-office		The individual describes what specific advantages working from home has	"the possibility to work from home. I like being I'm working from home for at least a day or two, for example, for it gives, in my opinion, it gives good work and now work home balance. you have time in between to make different lunches"

(Continued)

(Continued)

Relationship

Nature of relationship

The individual describes the kind of relationship they have with others

" Yeah, we do have that project leader or we do have the senior marketeer or whatever, but it's it's more of a natural way that it grew that way then that we say, OK, you are the team leader, that you are the project leader of that group"

Personal

The individual describes a relationship in a way that suggest they have a close, open or personal relationship

"The team is or at least my bond with her is fairly honest. And my bond to my leader is also very honest. If you are not comfortable in your own skin, just say it."

Distant

The individual describes a relationship in a way that suggest they have amore distant relationship

"But you then with 8 people, so you are not really discussing really private things."

Relationship characteristics

The individual describes traits and characteristics of their relationship with others, including their perception of others involvement

"And you see, I have to plan it, Then it happens. and the team members doesnt Take it over. So, um. Yeah, and if I don't plan it, it's not happening"

trust

The individual describes how trust plays a role in their relationships t the workplace

"yes, I think to a certain extend, that she does really trust us"

responsibility

The individual describes how responsibility plays a role at their workplace and their relationship with their team

"But they are responsible for that themselves. I cannot take that responsibility, and we are constantly saying to them, and we have several contact moments, and when you see I'm not going to finish it, you have you have to take responsibility too"

Personality traits

The individual describes personality traits or type of themselves or others

"Not that much for me, actually, but I think it depends a lot on how assertive you are as a person"

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Professional isolation	Isolation	The individual describes isolation at the work place, how it affects others and themselves, including the decreased contact to others	"And sometimes if you don't talk to someone the entire day that you're kind of like, am I by myself? Um, what am I working towards?"
	Lack of information flow	The individual describes the difficulty of spreading or receiving information and/or that they feel like they miss out on information being	"And that is the information you are missing now. And you really have to think about how can you get still get this information without an overloadlot of meetings with everyone"
	Decreased Development/growth	The individual describes that they feel like growth, whether professionally or personally, is hindered	"And if you were working within a very big world with a lot of people and we know that it takes some time before someone is really up to speed. Normally it takes a year, but then you are physically together and now you really have to look around the meeting to to get the information it needs."
	Decreased creativity	The individual describes the challenges of staying creative while working from home	" It really does kill creativity."

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Contact	Frequency of contact	The individual describes how often they have contact to their team and leader	"Oh, yeah, so we had our team meetings once a month on the first Tuesday of the month and we still have those"
	Nature of contact	The individual generally describes the atmosphere and/or setting of the contact moment	"a few weeks ago we did have a confrontation because we could just feel that the entire vibe was just really down and we did confront out leader and the entire team actually just laid it out open"
	Formal	The individual describes the contact as rather formal	"So in that sense, I would agree that that it's a bit more formal, although any catch-up moments that I have with colleagues tend to take a little bit longer than usual, especially because everybody misses that kind of social interaction and it's just difficult to recreate online."
	Informal	The individual describes the contact as rather informal	"but sometimes now that we have a new client she will just end up talking about that and then go over to another subject and before you know it we are talking about the US elections and that is also a little bit of a social hour and that happens about 2 or 3 times a week."
	Means of contact	The individual describes the means they use to communicate with each other	"you would be surprised of how many emails are now popping in. It used to be a lot but now it is a lot more. Because it is basically one of the only forms of actually actively engaging. I also noticed that my phone is beeping consistently"
	Efficiency of contact	The individual describes whether the contact moments are efficient and whether formal and informal contact moments are used as such	"Because you more than you work on a distance, you work more with make an appointment and we talk about it."
	Communication	The individual describes aspects regarding the communication within the team	"And then you do notice, that if it is a more sensitive topic that we are calling more. We are calling more, we are typing down more, you can notice that there is an entire string of emails related to that subject. But that is, you know, you pick, you devise a plan of what has priority, what is super sensitive, and then you make it work"

(Continued)

Improvement	activities	The individual describes which activities they would like to see at the workplace or activities they already tried and found to be helpful	"Well honestly, I had a suggestion, I suggested a few games and she also came with some suggestions like "among us" so we will probably end up playing that"
	relationship	The individual describes how they believe the relationships at the workplace could be improved	"to be aware of the value of sharing private information about this silly private talks not to be too easily into the formal business talks, because I think private talks have a very important function as well for bonding or # getting to know each other, getting to know how someone else likes things done or how he or she sees the world and the work and these kind of things"

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e-leadership	Competencies	The leaders competencies, traits and qualities are being described	"think empathy and you have it is really helpful if you can listen and know how to ask good questions, to get the right answers and get information and clear communication and a good mix between listening to people and engaging them within the processes of the project, that are going on and then communicating about it to the rest. is Very key."
	Support	The individual describes that they feel supported by the leader or more generally the support of the leader to the team and company	"Yeah, definitely, yeah, yeah, especially not just because of my the relationship I personally have with my manager, but also because of the type of person that she is. I think that would be no issue whatsoever. So also, if it's after hours or something, I'm sure she would be available in urgent situations."
	Roles	The individual describes the roles that the leader has in the organization	"You can notice that (the leader) now has more of a hovering role, which is quite fitting because she is the boss but then she hovers more and we really work on the accounts more."
	Approachability	The individual describes the approachability and availability of the leader	"But we also have a, for example, our leaders personal situation, she is like severely busy. So I think it is mostly up to us to just kind of push this through"
	Perceived control	The individual describes how controlling the leader is	"No, I think it's the workspace that you offer to the to the people that work on distance is very important to check or they have all the things they need to do the work, in a healthy way and in the way they are used on the job in the office"

Appendix C: Overview of Dimensions

	Pole 1	Neutral	Pole 2	Description
Support vs. Demand	<p>“And that is one of my agenda points for that meeting, because she is also encouraging us to bring up these kind of ideas, especially if you're working in such a big team. You can not only be on her shoulders. So, yeah, that'll help each other enough.” (Interview 6)</p>	<p>“I think it comes mostly from my own motivation. And that's something I need to take care of myself. It also has to do with like, uh, like I said, like going out there and getting some fresh air and having other activities and work. And, um, but I don't think there's anybody who could do this for me other than</p>	<p>“er wordt dan niet aan mij gevraagd van nou, vind je dat wel prettig idee” (Interview 14)</p>	<p>Being there, showing support, finding solutions, being approachable</p> <p>No consultation, making decisions for employees, task division, insisting on different solutions than employees would like</p>
Proximity vs. Distance	<p>“You see and hear things from people that you didn't know who has a dog, who's sitting in the attic behind the washer over the next to the washing machine, who has like a nice sort of office at home, children. You see them walk by cats or, you know, go over the laptop or whatever.” (Interview 11)</p>	<p>“This is still my first job and I am having a bit of a tough time deciding on where the line is between friends and colleagues” (Interview 2)</p>	<p>“But I think now that we are working online, it's easier for some people to kind of disappear almost and to keep an eye on everyone and to have an idea of what's going on, which is I think it's different.” (Interview 7)</p>	<p>Personal or informal, close contact, friends, social activities</p> <p>People disappearing, keeping distance, never hearing from them, very formal connections</p>

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Trust vs. Control	<p>"I feel like that is giving me a feeling of trust as well. If my boss were to constantly check on me how I was doing then I would have the suspicion that she thinks she as to intervene or something." (Interview 2)</p>	<p>"But that also means that we have to experiment more. We have to reinvent things. And that, I think, is fun to have a look at the normally regular project we always did and look at it and say, hey, how can we do the differently?" (Interview 6)</p>	<p>"You're telling me you don't have to go. Your choice, but what I feel is a different thing. So, so, so it's nonverbal kind of pressure and that is something that's not recognized." (Interview 15)</p>	<p>Lack of control, freedom to create and organise, own time management No freedom, pressure and non-verbal obligations. Inability to make choices</p>
Leader initiative vs. Employee initiative	<p>"Yeah, we had it once and we said we do it every week, but we didn't repeat it, but to me that's my fault because then I didn't plan it again. And you see, I have to plan it, then it happens. The team members don't take it over " (Interview 9)</p>	<p>"we do have that project leader or we do have the senior marketeer or whatever, but it's it's more of a natural way that it grew that way then that we say, OK, you are the team leader, that you are the project leader of that group. So we would make that very explicit and that could help." (Interview 6)</p>	<p>"Well, the structure that we all already had in place was that the team was in charge of team building exercises" (Interview 7)</p>	<p>The leader taking initiative to organise activities, trying to organise informal events and maintain their relationship The employees being proactive and organising activities themselves</p>
