

Research on 2021 challenges for work teams

by Peter Binetsch

What are your team's 2021 challenges?



A look back

The background and context of this research

The year 2020 has been very challenging for work teams on the one hand, and on the other hand, it has also allowed them to gain a lot of experience. Particularly in the IT environment, where agile working is an integral part of collaboration at many companies, I was interested in what tasks are now in store for team development in 2021. What do we need to focus on when leading and supporting teams?

Who was interviewed?

As a Collaboration Pilot, I spoke with more than 20 IT executives in the last weeks. Among them were CTO's, agile coaches as well as project managers and department heads. They work in small businesses as well as large corporations.

What was asked?

I conducted interviews, initially asking just one question, "What are the 2021 challenges for your work teams?" This question evolved into lively conversations in which I explored the team dimensions of individual, interaction, work processes/organization, and goals/outcomes with my interviewees.

What is the result of the research?

Based on the findings, a very clear result emerges. The essential source of the challenge stems from the topic of "remote work" and is for 2021:

Flow of the individual employee

What consequences can the lack of flow or only very limited flow have for employees?

Well over 80% of respondents indicated that it is difficult to keep track of how an employee is doing. The consequences of this were described as follows:

- Employees quit internally (in one case, several specialists even quit),
- Trust in the management and the company dwindles (as a result, loyalty decreases),
- Psychological security is no longer guaranteed, leading to increased stress and reduced performance
- Necessary support cannot be given because the problems are not known
- Employees become more aggressive and impatient due to emotional "undersupply", which leads to conflictual situations in meetings, for example.
- The togetherness disintegrates

What are the reasons behind this?

The following reasons were given:

- Objectification of communication
- Informal communication does not take place or takes place inadequately
- Overfocusing on factual issues
- Excessive demands on leadership

How can these challenges be met?

To my delight, all respondents were able to name a whole range of starting points and measures on how to better meet their employees.

1. agile events

The consistent implementation of agile methods helps a lot, as, for example, retrospectives and dailies alone are an excellent platform for exchange.

2. informal communication

In the physical world, informal communication describes conversations at the coffee machine, during breaks, or even brief encounters in the hallway.

In the virtual world, informal communication must be organized. It does not "simply take place. This also requires creativity to design these informal events so that it doesn't become just another virtual meeting.

3. emotionality

In addition to factual questioning, management must ask questions about the mood and emotions of the employee, especially in the virtual space. This clearly addresses the interest in the employee as a human being as well as the individual state of mind. Emotionality is thus given the space to be a natural part of virtual collaboration, just as it is in the physical office. There, you can usually see and feel the mood in direct communication; in front of the monitor, this is often more difficult to recognize.

4. purpose

Especially home office employees, who physically work for themselves day after day, need to understand the purpose of their work very well. The individual contribution that each person should make to the big picture must be clear and understandable. This creates clarity about the common goal and the bond to the company.

5. transparency / visualization

Work must be transparent and visible, e.g. via Kanban boards. This creates affiliation to the team and security to do the right thing.

The starting points and measures for the virtual world on the test bench

How do managers currently live their possibilities in (virtual) everyday life?

1. agile methods are sometimes only formally implemented in the virtual environment, but still too little consistently and inspiringly.
2. informal meetings are rarely planned consciously and creatively. Mostly, no events take place or they are not really designed in an exciting way.
3. many managers do not ask for emotions, probably for three reasons:
 - They are not used to it
 - They think too much emotion does not belong in the work environment
 - They are afraid of the answer
4. the connection between purpose and work results of employees is assumed to be implicitly known and not explicitly addressed again and again. However, this is necessary in the virtual space due to the lack of physical contact.
5. Work is largely visualized in the teams. What is missing is the visualization of the emotional. Also missing is transparency about the small steps in the crisis. Thoughts and plans get stuck in the heads in the home office and do not reach the employees or colleagues.

Conclusion

Virtual teams are in "working mode". Their roles are clear, processes are lived, results are achieved. But the individual person with all his or her emotions very obviously falls by the wayside.

Looking ahead, it is clear that "Flow" will be one of the new critical success factors for 2021. At the latest, when performance drops, subject matter experts quit and teams perceptibly disintegrate, ignoring the issue of employee flow will be an expensive, unaccounted for item in the corporate success record.

But it does not have to come to that. In the spirit of the saying "The early bird catches the worm", those companies with their teams will emerge as winners who invest in the topic of "individual leadership of team members" right now.

Take your chance now with our "Virtual Leadership Amplifier" and gain clarity on where you as a leader, as well as your team and your organization stand. Become active now and invest in building and expanding the basis of work in the virtual world – "Flow".

