

Delegation strengthens teams working remotely

Article

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Delegation strengthens teams working remotely

Team managers working remotely increase their chances of success as they hone their delegated skills.

In a remote work culture that is constantly evolving, teams are increasingly exposed to the consequences of virtual distancing. Its three dimensions—physical, operational, and emotional—affect how well team members work together in a virtual environment and how managers delegate tasks. Physical distance refers to the geographical distance between employees. Operational distance is characterized by organizational processes that can facilitate or hinder teamwork. Emotional distance describes the disappearance of the psychological bond between the people who make up the team, built as people get to know each other, rely more and more on each other and develop a sense of common purpose in the organization.

As remote team managers hone their delegating skills, they can effectively address the consequences of virtual distance—the biggest obstacle to their success—by using delegation as a tool to reduce physical, operational, and emotional distance. Our research shows that the strategic use of new technological solutions facilitating cooperation to delegate tasks can improve the quality of communication, technological competence and reduce the operational distance of teams working remotely.

Similarly, by delegating tasks, you can reduce differences in understanding the goals of specific activities — which can make great teams merely good. For example, a manager who delegates tasks that give opportunities for great benefits, but at the same time burdened with a high risk of failure (e.g. engaging influential stakeholders) can significantly reduce the emotional distance between him and the employee when the latter sees that the boss trusts him.

When managers effectively delegate tasks, they build trust and engagement. The result is deep emotional bonds between team members helping to overcome the barrier of physical distance. Skillful delegation also reduces the risk of micromanagement and lack of trust.

New definition of task delegation

In the context of remote work, leaders need to rethink the issue of delegating tasks. Delegation, a term derived from the Latin word *delegare*, means "to send as ambassador or representative." Traditional meanings of delegation include delegating tasks and appointing—for example, a manager sending an employee to represent the company at a conference or to attend an internal committee meeting on behalf of the manager.

However, in remote or hybrid work environments, this definition needs to be clarified. Delegating tasks online requires just a click, and the employee immediately gets information about what to do. In the virtual space, delegation therefore takes on a more nuanced meaning. Delegation here means not so much "sending as an ambassador" as practicing a certain skill.

Delegating tasks is perceived as a form of action. Usually, it is the manager who decides when to delegate the task, and the delegation of tasks itself is also a task well or badly performed. According to a broader, more modern definition, delegation is also a skill that can be developed and improved. Moreover, this skill is transferable, which means that it can serve managers in a variety of remote environments.

Our conclusions

To understand how leaders can effectively delegate tasks and develop this skill in remote environments, we analyzed the communication of nearly 1200 managers and employees who work in a global, large Fortune 500 organization through a certain online platform. We also interviewed 64 leaders managing different functional units in this organization. By learning about their management styles, we have identified the following habits that, when practiced consistently, can help build a key ability to delegate tasks.

Visualize

Above a certain level, no one is able to achieve serious success on their own. This statement is endorsed by 74% of the leaders we spoke to. Our interlocutors declared that they often entrust others with tasks that they were not ready to delegate before. "Empowering others and trusting them are more and more important attitudes. It takes some time to convince ourselves of this strategy, but ultimately it leads to a situation where leaders and team members are more productive and independent," says Aaron Kemmer, co-founder of Magic and Made In Space. His views are shared by most of the leaders we spoke to.

Many leaders feel that they have to do everything themselves, while often the opposite is true. Identifying your core skills, and better yet, skill gaps, will allow you to be a better leader. List everything you need to do, add an asterisk to the three most important tasks you specifically need to do, and circle which ones you can delegate to others. This simple process has been mastered by 81% of our most effective delegates, who understand that determining what to do on your own and what to ask someone else to do can take a lot of time and energy. It may be helpful to see it in a simple visual format; apps like Google Tasks and Microsoft To Do easily integrate with most existing workspaces.

Accept different approaches.

When you delegate, tasks are often done in a different way than you would do it yourself. That's okay. It's even constructive. Trust in others is the only way to expand the scope of your influence, as well as to create a pool of reliable people who can carry out such tasks. Trusting employees in the implementation of established tasks by default signals to them that you believe in their abilities and that they can take on additional responsibility. For employees, it's a powerful motivator, and for you as a leader, it's a source of strength that can also be called leverage.

So set consistent expectations for yourself and others. For tasks that require compliance with a specific protocol or procedure, in accordance with the organizational policy or requirements of the client, expectations should be clearly defined and, if possible, codified. But if the task can be done in many ways, and the result is more important than the process, allow creativity and let go of excessive control.

Communicate frequently and clearly.

Encourage team members to perform any task you assign them to the best of their ability, even if they aren't sure of the end result. Thanks to this, they will learn, and you will help them to go to a higher and higher level. However, you need to show your team the way to success, that is, provide the necessary information needed to carry out a specific task. Providing all relevant information at the very beginning can prevent bottlenecks from forming.

Frequent and clear communication is very important. Be available for follow-up questions about delegated tasks. A common mistake leaders make is delegating tasks and disappearing. For experienced employees, sometimes such a torch transfer is enough, but in many other cases, you

should still be in contact with the task to support the person implementing it or review the results after completion.

Use new technologies wisely.

When delegating tasks, technology is an ally rather than a barrier. There are many project management applications that make collaboration easier. Your team may already have a common preference for solutions like Basecamp, Trello, or Asana. If not, choose one app and make sure everyone is trained to use it. If you have a specific way you want to get the job done, send videos of the process or take the time to share your screen and show it live. With tools like Zoom and Teams, it's easy to share your screen and present a status update. A tip recommended by 88% of the leaders we talked to: Set checkpoints in the process of completing the task. They will be an opportunity to dispel doubts that may cause delays.

Design your own work schedule—and stick to it.

Delegating tasks affects not only the productivity of others, but also yours. Planning what you do during working hours requires discipline. If you're not careful, others can fill your day with meetings so you don't have time to work deeply — a problem cited by the 31% of the least effective delegates we've studied. If you need to work, say, on commitments, set aside time for it in your calendar. That way, you'll have a certain amount of time to complete a specific task and others will see that you're unavailable —which can discourage them from scheduling a meeting without asking first.

Remember that practice makes perfect.

Delegating tasks is a skill, just like playing chess or guitar. Don't expect to be good at it right away, but if you start now, you'll get better over time. Learning how to delegate tasks takes work. Getting the job done on your own may seem easier or faster, but the long-term benefits of focusing on your core competencies will pay off in the future.

The development of remote work has made managers feel the need to engage in every aspect of the company's business, but this can have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the team. To win, all its members must play their part. The task of managers is to organize and facilitate this task. To delegate tasks effectively, it is not enough to do it, you need to be proficient in it.

This first approach involves superficially implementing delegation of tasks. It resembles ticking off the most important points, which makes the results not impressive. The second approach treats delegating tasks as a way to make the best use of the potential of individual teams. Only thanks to the latter approach, from the current employees operating in a distributed model, effective teams working remotely can be formed. At a time when everyone is going through huge collective changes, the deliberate use of delegating skills can make your team adapt to them and thrive in this new work environment.