



**Niila Lillbacka**

**AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP IN VIRTUAL LEADING – THE EVER-GROWING  
IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS**

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Unit <b>International Business Management</b>			
Author <b>Niila Lillbacka</b>		Supervisor <b>Jenni Myllykoski</b>	
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Abstract			
<p>As remote and hybrid work models have seemingly come to stay, and traditional work environment has undergone drastic changes so too must leading change. Working from home has brought with it plethora of positives that employees and even employers are at this point reluctant to give up, but with them many negative effects have made themselves known.</p> <p>This study approaches remote working and virtual leading from the point of their biggest apparent problems and explains what academic world currently suggests as a solution, that being simply applying emotional intelligence and being an authentic person as a leader, and in doing so attempts to slightly further a subject currently still on its academic growth period.</p> <p>Authentic leadership from its roots to its current state was explained and in-depth interviews with experienced virtual leaders in Finnish tech field were conducted to find out whether methods that could be called authentic leading have naturally emerged and are currently in use.</p> <p>The results, while limited by the size of the study, further suggested authentic leadership to be an excellent theory with which to start approaching the world of virtual leading, as the leading philosophy currently in use by the interviewees echoed the values suggested in the literature review part of the study and heavily emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence in virtual leading.</p>			
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Additional information			

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The sudden, worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has changed the working environment in unprecedented ways. Office buildings emptied out while workers scurried home for the safety of themselves and their loved ones in the face of the still unknown disease. Social distancing and quarantining on such a scale would have some decades ago rendered the world to a screeching halt, but modern Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has proved itself more than capable of keeping the gears turning. While remote working as a concept has existed since 1970s, when it was noticed work could be done via phone and courier thus the earlier term *telecommuting*, and it being utilized in some fields successfully prior, the sudden increase in scale has resulted in a massive demand of information and thus significantly increased the interest on studying the matter. (Leonardelli, 2022.)

With remote working has come virtual leading. Earlier leadership style theories like transformational and transactional models have heavily depended on co-located work and everything that it entails like physical presence and in some cases literally looking over the shoulder to ensure correct things are progressing. Being someone's superior was practiced in speech patterns, body language, gestures, and power dynamics of conversations. These all are mostly gone now in virtual environments, and they must be substituted for somehow. Managing remote employees has also become much more difficult as reliably observing and evaluating work has become near impossible. Remote employees have thus become almost like subcontractors, who instead of controlling and managing now find themselves in need of leading and supporting. This change has resulted in many leaders having to change how they approach leading and managing in virtual environments. (Leonardelli, 2022; Murphy, 2021)

### 1.1 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this study is to first examine the change of leadership styles in companies, that due to the pandemic outbreak changed from mainly co-located work to either fully remote or hybrid work model through a literature review and comparing

the results to a qualitative study done on middle management in Finnish tech industry, all while focusing on if and how the importance of emotional intelligence is changing.

This study seeks to first establish a baseline of issues remote employees are facing by examining some recent studies on the matter and follow it up by presenting a potential solution in authentic leadership, which since its introduction by Luthans and Avolio (2003) remained less well known for almost two decades but has proved itself at least theoretically highly effective in virtual leading. Authentic leadership, as defined by Luthans and Avolio (2003), is leading by focusing on highly self-regulated reliability and trustworthiness, being a very genuine and veritable individual as a leader, in whose moral and ethical standing subordinates can grow to fully rely on, to foster an environment of trust in unfamiliar or fickle environment. This study aims to provide a literature review on the topic of problems caused by isolation of remote working and to understand if authentic leadership can help. It is worth noting however, that according to the cumulative growth of studies done on digital leadership it is still on its growth period, and as a research topic has not as of fall 2022 reached its maturity stage and thus the theory is expected to evolve further at a fast pace. (Tigre et al., 2022).

With a lot of current studies jumping to theorize the potential positives of authentic leadership (Whiteside & Dixon, 2022; Zhang, Guo, et al., 2022; Zhang, Zhao, et al., 2022), there seem to be relatively few actually taking a look at what kind of systems are being implemented in the actual business organizations and how do they reflect the current theory. In this study, some suggested optimal methods for everyday activities that are in line with authentic leadership, such as zoom call manners, frequency of virtual meetings, when to opt for using cameras or how often to demand it and text chat etiquette between different ranking members of the organization will be examined. The study itself will then compare the actual methods implemented in the participating leaders' organizations, and most importantly how they personally feel about them, what they have found to work and to see if some of the described attributes of authentic leadership have naturally emerged as the best solutions. leading to the research question:

*Have methods with characteristics of authentic leadership emerged in Finnish virtual leaders?*

While this study gives a relatively narrow view into the whole process of virtual leading, it could build some ground to base further research on and give an interesting snapshot on both what researchers might need to focus on currently and what companies could immediately adopt from current research.

## **1.2 Structure of the study**

Firstly, employee perspective will be taken to establish a baseline for issues that current literature suggests need solving, followed by a shift to leadership perspective, examining potential solution to these issues in the form of authentic leadership. In the study section itself, a qualitative, in-depth research interview study on people in leadership positions in Finnish tech industry with experience in virtual leading and direct subordinates working remotely is conducted and lastly findings will be presented and discussed.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter will introduce the current Covid-19-induced situation at workplaces. It will explain the biggest current perceived issues in remote working and later goes through suggested solution for these issues in preparation for the study.

### **2.1 Switch to remote work and virtual leading**

Leonardelli (2022) describes remote working and leadership as a marriage at gunpoint. While technology would have allowed such a switch sooner, the sudden pandemic forced a change faster than vast majority of firms could, or at the very least would have liked to handle pre-COVID-19. To the surprise of many however, the change went remarkably well as the firms adapted to the new conditions out of sheer necessity and had to allow the co-located workforce to work remotely. While the shift was smoother than expected some problems quickly became apparent. According to an audience poll of 400 answers in the presence of the author during the very first weeks of COVID-19 lockdown, 75% of responders reported their work productivity to be either similar or increased while working remotely, however 25% reported to be in dire need of immediate managerial support. Depending on work, the sudden lack of social interaction, break room chats and physical presence of others just to name a few problems, proved both extremely disruptive and demotivating for a part of the workforce, and while time and technology have helped with some problems, as of writing this thesis many are still in need of solving. (Leonardelli, 2022)

Working from home has brought with it many positives. Leonardelli (2022) mentions these including some extremely important things like reduced physical and sexual harassment, increased job accessibility for people with disabilities and increased free time as commuting hours are cut, just to name a few. While it is important to recognize the positives and focus on not losing them through potential changes, it is pivotal to identify the problematic aspects causing issues right now and finding solutions to them.



## 2.2 How does remote work affect employee wellbeing

### 2.2.1 Isolation

Work is a big part of our lives; we spend decades alongside it and often derive much of our sense of accomplishment and meaning from it. While people have never been more connected than now, social media and internet has already reduced meeting others in person leaving the only place some of us meet and get to connect with other people to be work. Thus, undoubtedly the biggest challenge in remote working is isolation. (Orhan et al., 2016). Even long before the pandemic researchers started to pick up on potential harmful effects of long-term remote working. A study by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) showed that spending half of the work week away leads to deteriorating workplace relationships.

According to (Orhan et al., 2016) the problem of workplace isolation is multifaceted. First issue comes due to face-to-face interactions promoting a feeling of belonging, thus the prolonged lack of close proximity with both colleagues and customers leads to feeling of loneliness. Marshall et al. (2007) define workplace loneliness as “lack of satisfying friendships or a lack of access to social networks in workplace”. According to their study when employees have a greater social support structure in the workplace it results in higher level of identification with the organization and their respective department and increased satisfaction with their supervisors. Importantly for this paper, they note that supervisors are seen as representatives of the company and perception of one’s supervisor heavily impacts the attitude towards the entire organization, meaning that even if superior is your only connection to the organization in a remote working situation, it is theoretically possible to achieve a more profound feeling of connection with the organization.

To further support this possibility a study by Dubinsky et al. (1995) examined the relationships between salespeople who work outside of the company walls selling the products and thus barely ever meeting their co-workers, and the organization itself. While employees like this are not by definition remote workers, the situation with direct superior being often the only connection to the organization is the same. The objective of the study at the time was whether a more transformational leading style

would enhance the feeling of social support structure and connectedness to the organization and by extension the work motivation and sales numbers, instead of strictly transactional style where more sales equals more rewards. The study found that while transformational model did increase the feelings of belonging supporting the notion that single connection to the organization is enough to do so, the transactional model still proved more effective in motivating employees to do more sales. These results, while from a different time and situation, highlight the potential of adding some transactional elements to modern remote working to give employee direct access to feeling of achieving a measurable task and receiving the acknowledgement for it.

Another side of isolation is the flow of information and quick access to key coworkers (Marshall et al., 2007.) Knowledge and social context of given information is lost with the lack of nonverbal cues and passing around information can become almost like a game of broken telephone. Remote team members can be more easily overlooked when information is shared and at the very least result in delays in receiving information. Furthermore Orhan et al. (2016) found, that all three aspects of social isolation, physical isolation and informational isolation negatively impact self-perceived performance and that in turn results in negative effects on job satisfaction and further increase the risk of an employee leaving the organization. (Orhan et al., 2016)

### 2.2.2 Climbing the corporate ladder

A poll from 2012 that questioned over 11000 employees on how they feel about remote work, and in addition to majority believing it to be isolating, 50% of answers also said it to negatively impact chances of receiving a promotion. The article considers a possible explanation to be the growing percentage of millennials in current workforce, and millennials being particularly interested in their own professional growth and thus frequent face-to-face feedback from superiors. When working remotely and not being constantly very closely connected with not only the organization, but also the current group you belong in, it is very difficult to not only have others notice how much work you have put in, but also see yourself how much input some other specific coworker may have had. Additionally, in some situations it might be difficult to notice if some team members are slacking off and if that is the case it is also an incentive to put in

less effort yourself. As such, there is evidence to show that remote working may “freeze” current role structure and be especially difficult for employees that have only begun working after Covid-19 to start advancing one’s position in an organization. (Leonardelli, 2022.)

### 2.2.3 Working from where you live

While ICT makes working from home possible to most, it also has much promise in aiding with the looming isolation induced psychological distress in both remote work and the elderly. Studies on the topic, however, are still scarce and it has become apparent ICT as it is now, is near-completely incapable of replicating many things that come with physical presence of others. Many suggested solutions such as increased meeting frequency through video conversing applications come with plethora of negatives, like the sheer annoyance of constant, not very useful meetings and having to potentially switch out of comfortable home clothing to something more fitting for business interactions and perhaps having to put on make-up for no other reason than a short video session. (Van Zoonen & Sivunen, 2022)

Xu et al. (2022) examined how remote working effects the balance between work and family life. They measured the self-perceived effect employees felt of work interfering with family and in turn family interfering with work during the early pandemic and found that while family interfered with work more, in general work ended up interfering with family less. A blurring of lines between work and family time might result in having a more difficult time to focus on work during working hours and, albeit less, not thinking about work on free time when work takes place in the same place as free time.

A study by Gillet et al. (2021) found similar results by examining how remote working affects highly work centric people. These employees attach larger parts of their identity into their work and thus derive more fulfillment for their psychological needs from their work. A highly work centric employee is more often willing to dedicate personal resources to furthering work related goals, sometimes getting in the way of personal life, and even at work are more engaged with their tasks than their less work centric colleagues. While a highly work centric employee may sound good from the

employer's perspective, according to the article these people still, as everyone does, have limited psychological capabilities. The problem of separating oneself from work even during off hours has been shown to cause anxiety and stress and slipping down the slope of focusing only on work while negating personal life further exhausts the resources and tires out the people in the personal lives of highly work centric employees. This all suggests it might be in the long-term interest of an employer to find ways to deter a person from overworking and even offer support reaching over the boundaries of work life, and thus make it easier to find fulfillment from their personal lives in addition to work.

The authors found, that while an employee's high work centrality normally is positively correlated with work engagement and negatively correlated with family satisfaction, remote working significantly dampens these effects. In other words, highly work centric person can be more satisfied with their personal life but simultaneously less engaged with their work in remote working situations, potentially suggesting that in some cases having a highly work centric person working remotely can enhance their personal wellbeing while lowering their work output, but as suggested earlier, being overall beneficial long-term. Even when manually lowering the work input of a work centric employee, they are still more likely to be amongst the best performers and thus well worth the care.

Gillet et al. (2021) suggest, that a remotely working, highly work centric employee can find it easier to switch between the roles they have for work and family and reduce the spillover of work into their personal lives. With work centric people tending to ignore personal responsibilities in favor of work responsibilities (Xie et al., 2017), working from home makes taking care of both more salient and with personal obligations better taken care of the person tends to feel more at ease and less of a burden to those around them.

Xie, Shi and Ma (2017) examined the marital happiness and personal fulfillment of dual income households and found that both a high degree of similarity in work centrism between the couple, and both having a highly work centric life, lower marital fulfillment. Meaning that couples that have similar levels of work-family centrality no matter what the level is are generally less happy than those that have differing levels.

interestingly and contrary to many popular beliefs the study found no evidence that in the case of a couple having differing levels of work centrality, the man being the one having higher work centrality would further increase marital happiness.

#### 2.2.4 Trust

Last big issue looking for solutions in remote working and worth bringing up here is that of trust. Multiple researchers highlight the issue of building trust in remote situations as one of the key problems. (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Elyousfi et al., 2021; Leonardelli, 2022; Saafein & Shaykhian, 2014; Zhang, Guo, et al., 2022).

Trust between humans is something that naturally develops when interacting with others and, amongst other things, observing genuine reactions and emotions. Leonardelli (2022) notes, that as remote work stripping away visual context and nonverbals serving as additional information during a conversation hinders our ability to build that trust.

Zhang, Guo, et al. (2022) mention, that sufficiently high trust level is necessary for people to experience psychological safety and feel safe to express their differences and opinions. You have to have a certain level of trust in a person before any conversation can go past the surface level of niceties and get more personal. It has also been observed that too low trust level can cause an individual to not have the confidence to express even a brilliant idea or a suggestion they might have leading to a loss for the organization.

Elyousfi, Anand and Dalmasso (2021) define the effect of trust in a virtual team situation as “level of confidence that an individual has in another’s competence and their willingness to act fair and in an ethical and predictable manner”. This is another factor that may cause increased stress in a remote team environment, where if level of trust is too low people have no faith in others to finish their tasks properly or timely.

Forming and leading of groups is another big trust related matter. Certain level of trust is needed for groups to form and in exchange groups can then enhance the feeling of trust and employee inclusion with the “one of us” mindset. Thus, taking this into

account, leading and fostering forming of right kind of grouping is an important task in virtual leading. (Kershaw et al., 2021; Leonardelli, 2022).

### **2.3 Why leading has to further replace managing**

Managing an employee has gone through many phases even in recent history, from cracking whips at quarries to looking over shoulder at an assembly line towards more modern, humane managing methods like conveying why your work is important, however, some key aspects of managing have stayed the same for ages. Murphy (2021) describes managers responsibilities as firstly planning and scheduling subordinates work, secondly evaluation performance and giving feedback, thirdly providing support and resources necessary to do those jobs, fourthly coordinating the work between different individuals and groups and lastly hiring, staffing, and training.

When going through this list of responsibilities and applying them to a remote employee some problems make themselves apparent. According to Murphy (2021) evaluation of work has become in some cases exceedingly difficult, with managers seeing the product and never the process and at that point the need for a managerial evaluation of the product becomes questionable. So as noted, managers cannot often see the process, but studies done on performance evaluation, like Campbell and Wiernik (2015), suggest focusing on specifically the performance during the process and not the outcome because outcomes are also influenced by factors outside of the employee's control. An employee can do amazing work for a long time, but some changing key factor can suddenly render most of the work useless, leaving manager to observe mostly redundant outcome and end up with a low evaluation of the workers capabilities.

Organizational citizenship, as defined by Halbesleben and Bellairs (2016), means behavior that is not formally required and from lack of which an employee cannot be punished, but is assumed to promote employee's performance. It can entail employees doing extra work or working better than needed due to it feeling more of an act to support a community one belongs to than a contractual obligation (Vološevici & Grigorescu, 2021). Murphy (2021) notes, that employee's level of organizational citizenship is not only more important for motivation when a task is independent, but

also perceived organizational citizenship is a key factor during managerial evaluations and in remote situations often fall outside of the scope. Many organizations during past few decades have developed often intricate systems of motivating and evaluating employees, that have been a large part of managers' everyday work. As such, Murphy (2021) hypothesizes that the role of a traditional managers is bound to diminish greatly.

## **2.4 Authentic leadership**

A potential solution many current academics are gravitating towards seems to be Authentic Leadership. Since its proposition by (Luthans & Avolio, 2003), the concept has been steadily gaining ground, but has arguably never been under more interest as it is now with the worldwide pandemic-induced remote work situation.

### **2.4.1 Beginnings and evolving definitions of authentic leadership**

Luthans and Avolio (2003) defined authentic leadership as “process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behavior on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development.” Further research by Ilies et al. (2005) sought to find a more defining model to authentic leadership, ending up with a four-component model consisting of self-awareness, unbiased processing, authentic behavior, and relational orientation. Gardner et al. (2005) continued by creating a very similar model, further focusing on self-awareness and self-regulation, noting that authentic leadership often boils down to high ethical standards that guide the leader in decision making.

In their study to further validate authentic leadership as its own distinct style with measurable benefits Walumbwa et al. (2008) found that while being significantly distinguishable from both ethical (Brown et al., 2005) and transformational (Brownell, 2010) leadership styles, it is positively correlated to them both and additionally while controlling for effects of other leadership styles, found authentic leadership to measurably increase organizational commitment, managerial satisfaction in followers, employee individual job satisfaction and job performance. Ethical leadership is a style focused on leading by inspiring courage in employees under difficult circumstances

by creating ethical codes that result in leaders' personal ethics influencing the whole organizations ethical culture, while transformational leadership refers to leading by using charisma to share a vision that employees can get caught up in and feel more motivated to work towards it (Brown et al., 2005; Brownell, 2010).

In summary, authentic leadership consists of focusing on being an authentic individual as a leader and focusing on creating and maintaining relations between oneself and followers, and amongst followers. Having clear ethical standards and acting by them consistently and reliably in long-term creating an atmosphere, where followers can expect certain behavior and subsequently have their expectations upheld effectively creates an atmosphere of trust. A good authentic leader expresses vulnerability in ways that does not undermine their authority by for example acknowledging, or even in extreme cases crying over disappointing and challenging situations, showing their own worry about it, being visibly touched, or otherwise positively emotionally affected by things as they happen. When led by an authentic leader, employees see them as both a leader and as a normal person like themselves, reducing the perceived gap between "us and them". When workforce views their leadership in such a light, it helps with things like bringing up personal matters such as mental health, mental resources, perceived workload and its effects, as in addition to having an employee-superior conversation with an authentic leader, employees might feel freer to have a person-to-person conversation as well. (Leonardelli, 2022; Whiteside & Dixon, 2022).

#### 2.4.2 Where, why, and how to apply authentic leadership model?

In their extensive study on authentic leadership Zhang et al. (2022) found, that firstly to thrive, authentic leadership needs a good ethical climate inside an organization. This means a general understanding within the organization that high moral standards and ethical business are important for the organizations culture. In addition, the study found that the leader's emotional intelligence is directly related to their capabilities as an authentic leader.

Within an organization that fosters a good ethical climate and an emotionally intelligent virtual leader practicing authentic leadership, the Zhang et al. (2022) found authentic leadership to greatly increase subordinates' psychological wellbeing,



including psychological safety and work engagement and organizational commitment, thus reducing turnover rate, it also had positive effect on level of trust and as such, employee creativity was noted to increase. Authentic leadership was also found to be negatively related with stress, exhaustion, and cynicism among employees. In their study, Arriagada-Venegas et al. (2022) found authentic leadership to also reduce levels of dehumanization of workers and by doing so simultaneously enhancing job satisfaction. They define employee dehumanization by diminishing the attribution of humanity to workers, thus making harsher decisions, like firing, cutting pay or benefits, or assigning too much work easier for the human psyche. (Zhang, Guo, et al., 2022).

While the effects of authentic leadership have been shown to increase with the leader's emotional intelligence, high emotional intelligence is certainly not a prerequisite. Authentic leadership can be broken down to methods that can be learned and applied to certain extent and thus further suggesting authentic leadership to be a more widely applicable solution to virtual leading issues than simply a tool that is only available to those with sufficient emotional intelligence. (Whiteside & Dixon, 2022)

As an example of good, learnable, authentic leadership practice in action, Leonardelli (2022) explains how an authentic leader can help an employee meet their immediate personal needs and alleviate a lot of personal stress which has a positive, albeit not clear at first glance, effect on work. In an internal analysis Microsoft found that when leaders directly assist employees with work-life balance it resulted in greater employee engagement. No leadership theory before authentic leadership has called for direct attention towards things like employees' marital happiness and wellbeing outside of office in such detail.

Studies by Zhang, Zhao, and Yu (2022) and Guenter, Schreurs and van Emmerik (2017) seek to find alternatives to face-to-face relationship forming at the workplace. According to them, both geographical dispersion and lack of communication can lead to disastrous effects on team performance, and thus the relationship forming between team members is the only potential solution and that the team leader is the key in making that happen. Zhang et al. (2022) argue that at the time of writing their study,

the current literature has not reached a consensus on the most effective leadership style in virtual environments and advocate for adoption of authentic leadership.

Task interdependence means type of work where members of a team are required to actively coordinate and cooperate with each other to avoid mistakes and slowing down. Zhang et al. (2022) suggest increasing interpersonal relationships inside a virtual team is desirable and argue that high quality interpersonal relationships between team members enhance team effectiveness in direct relation to the level of task interdependence, and in turn high task interdependence ends up promoting the forming of interpersonal relationships. Even in cases where the current tasks have low interdependence and thus can be completed without engaging with virtual team members, the increased high quality interpersonal relationships still increase the feeling of belonging and encourage team members to engage naturally, better simulating the feeling of an interconnected workplace.

For relationships to start forming and interdependent tasks to be completed Guenter et al. (2017) found it imperative to examine how to get people to speak up in Teams or Zoom and in their study found authentic leadership to reduce silence and motivate speaking up in less proactive employees. They theorized that authentic leadership, due to its focus on enacting one's truthful self, encourages even less proactive employees to be more active and found significant negative association between authentic leadership and employee silence in virtual situations, further suggesting authentic leadership to be a great tool in virtual leading.

Zhang et al. (2022) further suggest that any virtual team can benefit from positive effects of interpersonal relationships between team members by a leader "manually" increasing task interdependence. This would mean knowingly giving the team tasks that gently force them to engage with each other consistently in increasing fashion. Such a method in the short term would most likely reduce the effectiveness of a virtual team, but be a clear example of authentic leading, where leader prioritizes forming of more healthy work environment, interpersonal relationships and thus better psychologically fulfilling work. The indirect long-term effect of authentic leadership in this case would be a team that has an increased effectiveness of work when task interdependence is high.

### 2.4.3 Authentically leading groups

With authentic leadership being discussed, it might sound like the closer leader and subordinates are, the better, maybe even getting rid of the whole “us and them” grouping. Leonardelli (2022) however, warns leaders not to slip too far into thinking like that. His paper notes that those higher in organizational hierarchy transition to remote working more easily than those in lower, and if a leader ends up thinking their professional struggles are the same as their subordinates’ struggles, it is a big problem. The study emphasizes that even with authentic leading, the “us and them” divide between superiors and employees is not only good but necessary. Leaders understanding that their workforce is “them”, a different group with different problems, it is a prerequisite mindset for being capable of finding solutions to those problems.

A team is a group in of itself, but Kershaw et al. (2021) studied leading different smaller groups within the team. The paper examines the different identities a person can have within a work environment and how to take those into account when leading and according to it, intergroup conflicts are significant leadership challenges. When leading virtually and never seeing a team work together in a shared space and not seeing different employees talk amongst each other at all, noticing conflicts within groups can be extremely difficult and further highlights the need for employee self-reports and an authentic leader that bringing these issues up with is easier.

The study suggests a method for alleviating intergroup conflicts is for the leader to promote a collective, dual, or intergroup relational identity depending on the issue, and making sure not to provoke subgroup identities while doing it. For example, let’s say a team consists of people from two different nationalities, those people very easily form subgroups where the defining feature is their nationality that automatically makes them a tighter bunch. Promoting collective identity would mean focusing on highlighting that you are all part of this organization and team, promoting dual identity would mean that the leader supports both being in that group and also this team, thirdly focusing on relational identity would mean emphasizing how distinctive the subgroup you are in is, but that there is a mutually beneficial interconnectedness with this other group.

Kershaw et al. (2021) note, that the higher the level of perceived identity threat in a group is, the better leaders that focus on promoting subgroup identity are seen, and vice versa when threat level is low leaders who promote collective identity are viewed more favorably. Noticing the issue at hand and applying right kind of group leadership is a very difficult task and requires a lot of emotional intelligence and authenticity to get close enough to the groups to find out what the level of perceived threat is. As an example, if two subgroups work in a team from very friendly and culturally close countries they might appreciate more if they are treated as a part of collective group, but if a small subgroup works in an otherwise culturally quite homogenous group, they might feel their identity threatened when no extra attention is ever given to their culture and subgroup by the leader.

#### 2.4.4 Authentic leadership in interactions and meetings

Leadership, like any other form of relationship, is practiced in interactions between people and moving most, if not all those interactions to virtual spaces strips away a large portion of what information a discussion can convey. Human beings are extraordinarily good at reading emotions and meaning from the slightest facial expressions, and it is a pivotal part of the evolutionary success brought by social bonding in our species. While conversing, and as noted earlier in the study, people mostly subconsciously read multiple different nonverbal cues from the other person and a feeling of trust is slowly created and maintained when these signals consistently tell the same story as the words being spoken. These cues are also extremely important in showing synchronicity, which is the ability to respond immediately to what is being communicated to, for example signal whether the recipient has understood what was being conveyed leading to natural additions of information where needed and thus more clear communication. Synchronicity has been shown to speed up finding common ground in discussions. Missing from virtual interactions is also something called presence, often called immersion in the literature, which refers to the feeling of being present and sensing the presence of others in a situation, which aids in creating a sense of group membership. While video conferencing and potential for utilizing virtual reality in the future promises to aid in these problems through *Telepresence*, the technology at least for now is unable to fully substitute for actual physical presence

or does so unevenly when all members do not partake. (Leonardelli, 2022; Pally, 2001.)

With increasing task interdependence, that as noted earlier, may be leader created or natural but all-in-all, a desirable thing to help create better quality interpersonal relationships, trust, and grouping, comes an increased need for staying connected. While ICT offers a vast variety of different connection methods, and some descriptions of authentic leadership might seem like they suggest more meetings and face-cam sessions are better than less, there is evidence to show that often meetings and chats are perceived not just unnecessary but a big source of annoyance and cynicism in the workforce.

Leonardelli (2022) suggests a high number of meetings is more for the managerial level self-assurance than the good of employees or the work that is being done. With some authenticity and empathy, it should be possible to think about the number of meetings from the employees' perspective and call them more selectively and for good reasons.

The paper notes, for example, that meetings between the whole team are most important to set a common ground before a lot of work gets done and to prevent the possibility for information to go through multiple people before reaching everyone and risking it being critically altered in the process. Let's say someone gets information about an assignment through a coworker, and due to remote situation nobody notices the work being done is not quite what was required, a lot of time and effort can be wasted, and this can be traced back to problems with managerial evaluation in virtual leading mentioned earlier.

As task complexity increases, Scott and Einstein (2001) suggest the importance of input from others goes up in tandem, and also call for more attention to fluidity of group membership, as in a team that is in some category might not be completely included in every task, inviting every member of a team to a meeting about something that does not personally touch every one of them is wasted time for them and often an annoyance. With virtual leading and the ease with which conversing programs can be utilized it is even easier than before to invite only the necessary people. Some leaders

appear to view inviting the entire team for every meeting as a way to bolster group identity and help every member feel included, but that can easily be replaced for example with optional attendance and quick e-mail summaries of what was discussed.

So, with meetings being both important and annoying when in abundance, how to balance the amount falls to the leader's judgement. An authentic leader is supposed to engage in an authentic fashion with their followers and observe potential struggles, mental or work-related, and with the psychological need to see the faces of others having been highlighted already, surely having as many meetings as possible with cameras enabled to at least get the visual cues with what is being said is a good thing? If cameras are not on amongst a team that has a low level of trust, not seeing the faces of others enhances that feeling of distrust even further, not having a face to associate with a person makes it even harder to humanize them in your mind.

The conundrum gets even more perplexing however, as studies show camera usage in virtual meetings is highly tiring and unpleasant to most employees. A study by Shockley et al. (2021) found that the usage of camera during virtual meetings clearly increases fatigue even for the following day. The study showed that negative effects were stronger for women than men and increased in proportion to how low in organizational hierarchy the person is. For starters it may be uncomfortable to show one's personal space to coworkers and superiors, as many don't have a specific office room in their houses or apartments. A video chat might last for short period of time, but you still have to consider your appearance for it, meaning that the positive effect from working at home that is not having to dress up and apply make-up is redundant. The study shows that women are expected to put in much more work in "looking the part" at workspaces, meaning this is also an issue that disproportionately affects women partly explaining the increased fatigue observed.

As Shockley et al. (2021) mentioned, the perceived fatigue is lower in those higher in the organizational hierarchy, and there are clear positives in seeing at least someone's face during a meeting. An authentic leader should thus be the one making the personal sacrifice of "looking the part" most often, as the study suggests they have it easier than their followers anyway and minimize the need for employees' use of cameras. For employees to be able to look at the face of the leader and detect these ever-important

visual cues is pivotal for creating a feeling of authenticity in the leader. It is suggested that in a newly formed team cameras should be used less sparingly, to make sure everyone has a face in the minds of others and help build trust. In a team that already has higher level of trust cameras for employees might be unnecessary altogether.

Additionally, when it comes to virtual meetings, according to Leonardelli (2022) there is evidence to show that men tend speak more than women and are more likely to interrupt women when they talk during in-person meetings and such phenomenon is also likely to manifest similarly in remote teamwork and meetings. In an already isolated situation such neglect of one's presence has potentially even more negative impact. A leader practicing authentic leadership should make note of this and actively call out interruptions, no matter who interrupts who, when they occur to help in creating a sense of inclusion and acknowledgement of presence. Taking a moment to acknowledge when something like a blatant interruption of someone else also sends a message about a leaders moral standing and that they are willing to act according to their ethical code.

#### 2.4.5 Authentic leadership in text-only communication

There is clear evidence to suggest the number of meetings and video chats needs to be held reasonably low, but the lines of communication need to be kept open somewhere. Leaders engaging in consistent, effective communication with their followers are shown to be perceived as strong performers, after all (Saafein & Shaykhian, 2014).

As soon as text-based business communication began, studies concerned about increased potential for misunderstandings due to lack of nonverbal and even verbal cues that could be read during face-to-face conversation started appearing (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

Darics (2020) arguments, that while many sources still call for text-based business interactions to be to the point, official, grammatically correct, and respectful of the time of others like a traditional e-mail, instant message interactions that deviate from this can hold within them many of the same nonverbal cues as speech. Good authentic virtual leaders can efficiently utilize these methods to simulate a feeling of natural,

face to face discussion and thus help build and maintain “humanity” and with it, trust. (Darics, 2020; Kalman & Gergle, 2010)

The study suggests that using abbreviations, emoticons and comic strip sounds like “grr” and disregarding grammatical rules like proper capitalization, traditionally thought imperative in work-related communication can make the conversation more natural and relaxed or in some cases signal status if needed. Injecting things like full capitalization of some words can express urgency and power over the recipient (“do it today” vs. “do it TODAY”). Using nonlexical tokens like “umm” in written form to soften a message or symbolize where you would have needed a pause to think (Ward, 2004) or elongating some words to seem more relaxed and joking (“a long time” vs “a loong time”) are some of the further ways of conveying feeling. A method called “utterance chunking” can also be used to control the recipients time in an instant messaging application, it means instead of writing one long paragraph, the sender constantly sends parts of the message one at a time establishing a feeling of power dynamic, where one must wait and listen while the other talks (Markman, 2015). (Darics, 2020; Haas et al., 2011.)

Having the text channels be much less traditionally business official and talking more freely like people would write each other in their private lives can not only convey many of the non-verbal cues that are in dire need of replacing, but also help leader further seem more authentic and a normal person, again, without undermining their status.

Leonardelli (2022) notes however, that when it comes to familiarity between different hierarchical levels especially in remote situations, the younger generation is miles ahead. According to him, millennials are both more used to ICT technology, and more accustomed to very casual level of communication due to spending their youth with mobile devices and constant text-based communication. Targeted training is suggested to help foster inclusion and to not subject those already very used to communication technology to unnecessary training.



## 2.5 Summary and other styles

Remote and hybrid work offer some great benefits but clearly come with their fair share of issues from informational and social isolation to lack of trust and sufficient team bonds (Marshall et al., 2007; Orhan et al., 2016; Van Zoonen & Sivunen, 2022; Xu et al., 2022). If an employee turns into a subcontractor (Murphy, 2021) different methods of binding them to the team and the organization and to foster motivation are needed and authentic leadership seems to answer many of those needs (Gardner et al., 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

Within an organization with sufficient ethical climate authentic leadership can bring out the humanity in a leader without damaging the authority too much, creating a person-to-person connection between the employee and their leader resulting in greater trust in the leader on an individual level, where the employee has faith in their leaders to act in their favor when possible, even when they cannot observe it (Zhang, Guo, et al., 2022). Authentic leadership has been shown to result in greater psychological wellbeing, feeling of safety even when isolated from the organization and reducing turnover rate and even answering some bigger issues such as reducing employee dehumanization (Arriagada-Venegas et al., 2022).

While examining the notable positives of authentic leadership, other leadership styles should be kept in mind, as noted by Walumbwa et al. (2008), while authentic leadership is distinguishable on its own, it is positively correlated with at least ethical and transformational leadership styles and there is great potential in utilizing it in tandem with other styles as well.

Gross (2018) examined the effects of transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles in virtual leading just in time before the pandemic turned the world of virtual leading on its head. He noted that virtual leading is, at the time of writing of his paper, a currently emerging process but results of some main leadership theories can be observed. Transactional style, a leadership theory focused on creating efficiency in employees through assigning clear, completable tasks and providing rewards or punishments, accordingly, was mostly found to influence efficient task completion but it can also provide some framework for evaluable, rewardable task

assigning methods that can be utilized to provide feeling of recognition to employee. Transformational style mostly affected trust relationships, while laissez-faire, a hands-off leadership approach created to foster creativity by allowing employees freedom to experiment, seemed most directly applicable to virtual situations and similarly to co-located situations was found to notably increased innovativeness. (Ahmed Iqbal et al., 2021; Brownell, 2010; Gross, 2018; Leonardelli, 2022)

While authentic leadership generally seems a more modern and, in some cases, almost an all-encompassing solution when leading has to be done virtually, it is important to note that all work situations are not the same and different leadership styles still hold a lot of value when utilized alone or in tandem with authentic leadership, and thus are important to be kept in mind.

### 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

While a quantitative study provides far more reliable and substantial data, a qualitative approach is capable of providing much more insight into a topic than otherwise possible, which is vital in examining a complicated topic such as emotional intelligence leading to it being chosen as the research method. Furthermore, in-depth research interview approach was taken, to ensure sufficient level of detail and understanding of the answers was reached. (Adams et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009)

Five interviews were conducted with experienced leaders, each of them having pre-Covid-19 experience, having worked fully remotely during the lockdowns and now all but one having changed to a hybrid model. All five interviewees were men in middle management positions in the Finnish tech field. Tech as a field was selected due to majority of work already being done on computers and more globally than in many other fields, resulting in easy switch to remote work, all of the five interviewees agreed that they could somewhat seamlessly continue their work as it was even when suddenly switching to remote work. As the work itself was not a big issue, it was presumed that more time has been available to adjust management methods rather than spending a lot of that time at the start of lockdowns establishing a framework, innovating, and implementing necessary ICT, so that the work can be done in the first place. Interviews lasted between 25 and 50 minutes, as interviewees had highly differing amounts to say on the topics. Due to high privacy level of the companies of some participants, out of the respect for shared personal philosophies by the interviewees and as agreed, the data will be presented in an anonymous fashion. Question order, and other responses biases were considered in the planning stage, with the interview questions being very open and the structure of the interview being somewhat random. (Adams et al., 2012)

The aim of the interviews was to find out to what extent the leaders interviewed had developed and utilized methods with similar characteristics to authentic leadership. The interviews also sought to find out what personal experience has led to the methods utilized by each interviewee. Due to its small sample size and only one researcher conducting the study, the high potential for researcher and selection bias must be considered when evaluating the results. (Adams et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009 p. 270)

### 3.1 Data collection

As mentioned, five in-depth research interviews were conducted with a semi-structured approach following the guide of Adams et al. (2012). A general road map of topics to touch during the interview was prepared, but no interview followed the same route. As topics came up naturally during previous answers the discussion would be directed towards those topics by the interviewer. An in-depth, qualitative interview was selected despite its difficulty, because instead of yes or no questions, the topic demanded a closer look at most answers and a discussion to find out reasons behind the answers given.

As suggested and staying within recommended limits by Adams et al. (2012) for interview duration guidelines, the interviews had a duration between 25 and 50 minutes, depending on each interviewee. The interview structure was pre-tested as was possible with the methods suggested by Adams et al. (2012) and the start of the interview was established with their suggested methods of loosely explaining the interview, its general purpose without divulging anything that may skew the answers, and asking general simpler questions first, to put the subject at ease and as needed the confidentiality of the interview was further emphasized. The goal of reaching approximately 80/20 in the percentage of subjects talking to interviewer talking was easily achieved and as instructed in the book, answers to important questions were immediately summarized for the interviewee to confirm whether the interpretation was correct.

The list of points to bring up during the interview were as follows: Noticing problems in remote employees and what kind of remote-only issues have appeared, methods of keeping employees tied to organization and their respective teams, managerial evaluations, remote meetings and web camera usage, text chat and its officiality, perceived familiarity between interviewees and their subordinates in remote versus co-located work, perceived gender differences, and lastly how they view emotional intelligence. Unlike other topics, the talk about emotional intelligence was deliberately left last to avoid it causing other answers to gravitate towards more emotionally

intelligent seeming ones. Many other topics naturally came up during the discussions and are presented in the results as appropriate.

Interviewee A is a project leader in product development sector in tech industry with over 15 years of experience in leadership positions with big emphasis on employee creativity. Interviewee B works as a head of operations in a consult firm with 20 years of experience in the field and over a year in his current position. Interviewee C is a senior project manager in tech industry with over 15 years of leadership experience and the most result-oriented of the bunch with heavy emphasis on leading things and not so much the people. Interviewee D is a line manager in a matrix organization with over 5 years of experience but due to the organizational structure, not as close with subordinates as other interviewees. Lastly interviewee E, a developer team lead also with over 15 years of experience in management.

Each interview was recorded, as agreed with each participant, held in Finnish, and translated and transcribed to text format for data analysis, at this point discussions that had followed different routes were organized to be in roughly the same order in text for comparability reasons. During the transcribing process, notes were added to indicate the way in which information was given, also following the in-depth interview as explained by Adams et al. (2012), to analyze the answers further. Ironically, as a big part of the study is non-verbal cues and web cameras, during the interviews done through online meetings, it ended up being near impossible to gather reliable body language data through webcams.

While the sample size must be recognized small, a surprisingly high degree of saturation was achieved as the discussions quickly started to echo similar sentiments and instead of completely new takes which were quite rare towards the end, answers instead tended to present different justifications to their points of view resulting in multiple explanations to a single stand. Interviews were split topic by topic and presented with each interviewees point of view given with their general reaction to the question when appropriate, before compared to the earlier literature review.

### **3.2 Data analysis**

According to Merriam (2009 p. 176) data analysis has to be the process used to answer the research question and thus the overall analysis begins by identifying segments that respond to the research question. The transcribed interviews were sorted based on different points where they reached some characteristics of authentic leadership and compared together, considering each interviewees experience and position, during this open coding process some direct quotes were extracted from the raw interviews along with the notes. (Merriam, 2009)

After each interview was examined a master list was formed from the combination of each interviews notes and further sorted into data clusters more in line with the final presentation of the data. At this point it became apparent that some categories failed to be mutually exclusive, namely organizational citizenship enforcing and intra-team bond creating, and had to be merged.

After the first level of analysis was completed and the data was in order and properly categorized, a second level analysis was conducted by going through recorded interviews once more, comparing written data to the verbal delivery and non-verbal cues that could be perceived. At this point quotes were re-examined to make sure they are in line with the verbal delivery and properly convey what was said. (Adams et al., 2012)

## 4 RESULTS

In this section results and interpretations of the interviews will be presented loosely following the structure of the earlier literature review. The position and analysis of the answer of each interviewee will be discussed separately if they differ and compared to both each other and theory presented prior.

### 4.1 Employee issues in remote work

Answers were quite close to what was suggested by Orhan et al. (2016) According to interviewees A and B problems in flow of information were the fastest to make themselves known, as quick chats became rigid meetings and line between work and free time started to muddle as all of that extra work scheduling took couldn't take away from real work. According to A, his work had already spilled over business hours long ago and in an attempt to combat this he would share his own experiences on how to deal with the situation by creating routines where you do some specific action when you start working and when you stop working to train your brain to realize that this is the new "coming home from work", in addition to putting emphasis on clocking hours precisely to not work too much. In addition to information problems, employee loneliness and even an increase in substance abuse in interviewee A's case has been noticed.

Interviewee D noted the issue of information isolation but assumed the reason to be worse ICT solutions still in use at the time of the beginning of the pandemic lockdowns. Interviewee E mentioned biggest issue simply employees being worried about the state of the world during the early pandemic but put emphasis on employees that started their careers or joined their teams during the lockdowns as some of them spent years not really seeing their colleagues and having large issues assimilating.

Interviewee C found remote working most problematic. According to him, ICT allows talking about what you must, and everything extra feels unnatural and awkward:

*"In person if you go talk about work things you end up chatting about something else as well, lacking that momentarily is fine but long term*

*those are the things that help people really know each other, and in those random conversations invisible work like having ideas takes place and the organization loses when that is gone.”*

On the same note C mentions that information deficiency has been noticed to cause increase in passive behavior when employees are not sure what is going on not having been a part of every conversation and might not find the most convenient timing to ask.

#### **4.2 Noticing the issues in remote employees**

All interviewees acknowledged the increase in difficulty of noticing issues such as depression, fatigue, stress, annoyance to name a few, in remote employee compared to co-located work. Only interviewee C put emphasis on lowering results being a clear indicator, according to his experience walking up to someone with a coffee mug in hand and asking how things are going feels natural but a call on Teams to ask how things are going feels like an interrogation. Other answers echoed the sentiment of just asking about issues through remote meetings being highly ineffective as it is extremely far from being a natural conversation and talking about anything to a web camera, especially one’s feelings, feels almost like holding a presentation about it. According to interviewee D however, for him employee self-reports are the main way.

Interviewees A, B and E on the other hand all agreed that the best way is to know each and every employee on a personal level and then relying on noticing the small differences in that person. Interviewee B mentioned deliberately holding one on one talks to create an “emotional baseline” for each subordinate to compare subtle changes to and notice for example if someone is talking less than usual or using webcam less than usual. Interviewee E was on same track, mentioning picking up on the weak signs people are giving out. On the topic interviewee A talked about his values in leading:

*“As I have done this for a long time it has become very important to me to know every subordinate, and when I know them, I understand their style of talking, their habits, their methods of presenting things and if a*



*change in these occurs due to stress or something else, there might be a certain tightness to their normal demeanor which I pick up on.”*

In addition, he mentioned that certainly in some cases it becomes very apparent, like increased sick leave or other subordinates coming up to tell that some colleague might need extra support.

Later, while on a different topic, trying to get information out of some of his more stubborn Finnish male subordinates came up, as according to him it is considered manly by some to not open up about issues especially when they are related to mental health, and getting to the information takes some special measures:

*“Sometimes with some male subordinates you need to first reach a required level of connection, then establish an informal conversation and finally in that conversation create a situation where it is easy to matter-of-factly mention that they find something to be problematic.”*

His description made it seem like he is deliberately trying to create a natural situation through online tools as best he can, like interview C described walking up to someone with a coffee mug asking how it’s going and allowing issues to come up in a more relaxed way.

#### **4.3 Intra-team trust and relationships and organizational citizenship**

While all interviewees put heavy emphasis on a high level of trust within the team being one of the very prerequisites for being able to work, interviewee C had very strong views about trust level in teams. According to him even if work is independent first and foremost humans need to belong to a team with trust to combat stress, which, if one feels alone is inevitable and debilitating. He mentions on the topic of trust, that in some cultures no business is done before the level of trust is sufficient, and while in Finland people can go straight to business, he sees it as a thing that is currently undergoing change. When it comes to remote teams, interviewee C, even while being a result oriented leader, notes that you must just invest work hours to people sitting with headsets on slowly breaking the ice and awkwardness asking who everyone is

and maybe even get them to every day ask others things like “how are you doing, what are you doing today, can I help somehow?” and in that way start creating the trust.

Interviewee A had a similar view, he too noted that should a new member join a remote working team he will without a question use multiple hours of every team members time with mandatory webcams to make sure everyone introduces themselves properly and the team has time to relax and talk about non-work-related things. Interestingly, after that interviewee A mentioned that he will deliberately create situations where the new employee has a chance to naturally have one on one conversations with all team members, somewhat along the lines of increased manual task interdependence proposed by Zhang et al. (2022). On the topic of team trust, even if task interdependence is very low, he seemed to find it weird that it even has to be asked about and simply said:

*“Before we can even begin to work as a team it is pivotal that trust relationships between both me and the subordinates, and amongst all subordinates are sufficient, only then we can start doing our best work.”*

Interviewee B mentioned team trust and relationships to be very important, and a constant, active challenge for him. While acknowledging diminishing returns in investing to team interconnectedness when task interdependence is low, intra-team trust is still, according to him, extremely important. To facilitate some natural discussion, Interviewee B spends time thinking of topics for short information sharing sessions at the end of team meetings about things he knows to be shared points of interests, and as team discusses what they might have learned, hopefully someone amongst them, who knows more about the topic at hand naturally takes the floor for a while and some discussing ensues.

Interviewee D noted that as a line manager he is not actively participating in the actual work being done and thus cannot say much on the topic but thinks of team spirit and trust as prerequisite for good results and makes sure all his subordinates know that he is available if any assistance on the matter is required. While that is the case, D did mention, that at the beginning of pandemic lockdowns weekly team meetings were

started just to make sure people see the faces of others and feel less lonely and at times it was deemed necessary to momentarily increase the frequency to twice a week.

Interviewee E mentions that one way to increase a trust in remote team is to make sure everyone knows the professional capabilities of their coworkers and thus can at least have the trust in work getting done, but while that is the case, according to him, subordinates might be more willing to talk about their professional strengths and not so much their weaknesses, learning of which would also be a key part in learning to work as a team. He mentions team relationships being more important to some than they are to others when it comes to work motivation and while doing his best as a superior to make sure all the motivational aspects are aligned for each subordinate, fostering good team spirit remotely is difficult and needs more than just the working to happen. According to E, hybrid model is the required remedy for this, as getting people to the office even once a week and making sure that the day is not too busy with work is the necessary framework for natural chats and team bonding to occur.

As suggested by Dubinsky et al. (1995) and Marshall et al. (2007), each interviewee generally agreed that connection to the team and direct superior is enough to keep the level of employees' organizational citizenship sufficient and thus the answers were heavily tied to team trust and relationships leaving interviewees C and E with nothing extra to say specifically about organizational ties. Interviewee D noted, that in addition to trusting in team ties, increased and more open communication about the state of the organization kept employees aware of the company as a whole and was found helpful.

While his answer was also very much tied to intra-team relationship building, interviewee B found forced socializing to keep employees closer to the organization awkward and annoying noting:

*“At a real coffee table many conversations naturally take place that people can switch among, in a remote discussion room only one person can talk at a time and attempting to recreate this coffee table would require breakout rooms, which would then prevent people from taking part in other conversations and the whole thing is just too complicated.”*

Interviewee A also found collective methods to be unnecessary, mentioning that he utilized his personal relationships with each employee to find those who seemed to drift too far from organizational culture, and applied personalized methods to each situation also saying, that some subordinates have never shown any signs of losing organizational citizenship no matter how long they work remotely, as long as the team is good.

#### **4.4 Managerial evaluation remotely and the role of the manager**

When discussing this section, the choice of tech as the field for interviews yielded some of the biggest differences to material in literature review section of this study. According to the answers, the more traditional role of a manager referred to by Murphy (2021) has evolved to something different on the field of tech long before the pandemic lockdowns and change to remote work. Even though the official work title of some of the interviewees was a manager, everyone found the word leader more fitting and more in line of their actual work.

The one closest to Murphy's (2021) description of a traditional manager was interviewee D, being the line manager in a matrix organization. On the topic of evaluating employees, he mentioned holding quarterly chats, for which he first asks for project managers' evaluations of the subordinate and then holds a talk about it, discussing potential needs for more training or new equipment.

Interviewee A notes, that employee evaluation has not been a problem in the slightest, as the industry supported it even before remote work but has noticed issues with that in other fields and understands that completely.

Interviewees C and E did not find evaluating remotely much more difficult, with both saying that direct results are easily measurable. E mentioned asking each employee periodically what they plan to do today or tomorrow and if the answers repeat too much from day to day it can indicate some problems. Interviewee C did continue on the topic:

*“People who learn to work together can be the best individuals, when good information is willingly shared instead of knowingly kept to oneself for purposes of outperforming others and getting to stand out alone, everyone benefits and those people are the ones deserving recognition and credit, however those people are harder to notice.”*

It seemed that interviewee C is worried about some employee coming up with a method of increasing work performance and instead of sharing it, they keep quiet about it. From an employee’s point of view this does seem logical as if you keep quiet about it, one can finish their daily work faster and benefit with free time, whereas if you share the idea workload increases in proportion to keep the workdays at equal length and the organization would be the one to benefit. Normally coming up with a great new idea might earn an employee a lot of recognition and even put them directly in line for a promotion, but if an employee feels like that is unlikely to happen, they might instead opt for the aforementioned personal gain of more free time.

Interviewee B however, with his subordinates being consulted, noted that remote working has actually made employee evaluation a bit easier. Before pandemic lockdowns consult-client meetings would happen at a physical location and be impossible to evaluate, whereas you can join an online meeting and listen in.

#### **4.5 Remote meeting frequency, web-cameras, and text chat formality**

When it came to the topic of webcams each interviewee seemingly found that subordinates tend to use cameras less often than desired.

Interviewee A explained, that at the start of the lockdowns no cameras were used due to them feeling awkward, before executives decreed that they should be always on for everyone as it was realized how much communication suffers when all non-verbal cues are cut. It turned out, however, that demanding constant webcam usage is not a lasting solution and it quickly became more loosely enforced. Interviewee A emphasizes, that he himself joins every remote meeting just like he would an on-location meeting, looking the same and always using camera, but does not demand the same from subordinates, unless it is a small meeting and topics discussed are, for example,

delicate and difficult to bring up, and require non-verbal cues to be communicated without misunderstandings.

Interviewee C believes the meeting frequency to be a personal thing for each employee, noting that some need constant affirmation to know that they are doing the right things, and some get annoyed by it. According to C, if the team is not new, there is no need for unnecessary meetings and leaders should take care to not invite people to meetings who do not have an active part in them saying:

*“Problems need to be solved outside remote meetings, if problems are actively getting solved in team meetings it means a few people are talking and others are just listening and while listening, they get bored, pick up their phones and those talking will get frustrated because they know they are not being listened to.”*

On the topic of webcams, interviewee C also emphasized the greater need for them if team is newer, but as time passed one by one people stopped always using them and he did not feel it necessary to demand.

Interviewee D had the same idea about some employees needing more meetings and some just want to do their jobs without interruptions, noting that people get frustrated when called to meetings they do not get anything out of. While talking about webcams, interviewee D seemed puzzled about why employees do not seem to want to use them when they would be such a great source of information about the subordinate and mentioned, that they never get turned on automatically and sometimes not even when asked.

Interviewee B stated that the number of meetings has to be the minimum needed to keep frustration at bay, and as the number of meetings is kept as low as possible it is more sensible to demand webcam usage in those, at least for those talking and being in the center of things.

Interviewee E regretted holding too few meetings during the pandemic lockdown, especially the start of it, but also notes that the meeting frequency can go down as team

gets to know each other, while talking about webcams he mentioned noticing how women prefer to not use webcams especially during the morning hours, and due to realizing that there may be differing expectations for appearances, has chosen not to press the issue.

The topic of formality of text-based communication seemed to surprise the interviewees, with multiple answers stating that they have not thought about it but now that they do there is a clear difference. As it was a new idea many answers evolved a bit during the discussion of it.

Interviewee E started off by seeming a bit frustrated with text communication being split to multiple different platforms, he noted that chat messages are indeed much less formal and some important discussions that would be easily accessible and stored as emails get lost in chats and it makes his job harder. As the discussion progressed however, interviewee E realized that from an employee point of view the chats being more informal and more easily approachable might be a key factor in superior being approachable enough as some topics might feel too unnatural to write in an email format. While on the topic he did mention it would be nice to have some sort of shared logic as to who writes what and where but perhaps it is a net positive for the organization as a whole.

Interviewee C, who at many points has put emphasis on employee creativity to produce results answered very fast and very clearly that the chat has to be as informal as possible with no ifs and or buts:

*“Nobody has EVER come to complain that things are too informal, unlike the opposite, if the leader themselves reveals their hand and casually talks about their personal things it only increases the trust in them, if there is someone in the team whose feelings get hurt by informal chatting, they will get hurt by something else eventually and you cannot look to please absolutely everyone.”*

Interviewee B had a more political standpoint to formality levels in text chats, stating that every chat reflects personal relationships between each participant and when a

new chatroom is established there is a period of searching the optimal level, everyone looking for hints from the messages of others that would indicate what formality level they deem appropriate for that specific chat. Interviewee A had similar thoughts stating, that the better you know the recipients the more informal chat is being used all the way to what he would call extremely informal. When going up in the organizational hierarchy, A mentions that the chats quickly turn very formal, but notes that his personal view is that the more informal chat the better, especially if innovation is part of the work. According to him informal chat allows someone to freely describe one's thoughts and ideas.

#### **4.6 Perceived importance of emotional intelligence**

Interviewees A, B and E described emotional intelligence as extremely important, if not pivotal in their work, interviewee C noted it to be surprisingly important and interviewee D found it simply valuable.

Interviewee A emphasizes emotional intelligence as something he believes to be his core strength and a big reason he now is where and who he is. He describes emotional intelligence as a very important factor and something that guides him in work related decisions. While A states that emotional intelligence has always been part of him, there is a noticeable increase in needing it during remote working saying:

*“I am sure that with less emotional intelligence I would have missed many of those small indicators of something being wrong that I have picked up so far.”*

Interviewee B agrees with the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership positions and also notes that its importance has increased with remote working. According to him co-located work offers many more signs to interpret, such as subordinate not having bothered with visiting a barber in quite a while or not putting much thought to wearing different clothing at least sometimes, those can be telling of overloaded capacity but remotely you need to dig much deeper for them.



Interviewee E was very stern in his view that society's view of intelligence is too limited and not enough importance is given to things like emotional intelligence over something you can measure with a logic test and emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence in picking up weak signals. He also notes that before Covid-19 lockdown when he would constantly see his subordinates at the office, he could pick up changes in body language and expressions that can indicate stress and problems and while picking up those is already emotional intelligence, finding the weaker signals that replace them in a remote worker requires much more of it.

Interviewee C noted the high importance of emotional intelligence having been a surprise to him and while on the topic explaining:

*“Things are often dependent on such small details, while doing things sometimes you can forget that its people who are doing those things and if the focus slips too much to be on those things you become a leader whose values subordinates do not believe in, and they do not give everything they can to a leader like that. If you keep giving more and more of yourself your subordinates will reply with reciprocity.”*

With some of the interviewees the subject of the humanization of leader naturally came up when talking about authenticity and emotional intelligence in leading. Interviewee C emphasized it being a positive thing altogether while interviewee E had much more to say:

*“Old fashioned leaders often cannot shake off old habits even if they want to, the difference is whether you are a manager or a leader, if you keep micromanaging deeper and deeper it slips into being leading by fear. While that is the case if you become too friendly, a funny guy who wants to please everyone and avoid all conflicts you can end up no longer working for the good of the firm. I aspire to know everyone individually and support them as an individual. When you get too close, sometimes you notice that your close relationship is in danger of being abused, in that situation you simply need to know people well enough to*

*know who plays their own game and who plays a team game and take a firm stance towards those who try to get personal gain, that might result in a small chip in the relationship but that's how it goes. You must stay close enough to be a friend but keep long enough of a distance for it not to affect your decision-making capabilities. No matter how good buddies you seem to be in the end being a leader is lonely work.”*

#### **4.7 Summary**

While it cannot be said that any one of the interviewees is clearly practicing authentic leadership, it is clear that some characteristics of it do appear in each interviewee. During their time leading remote and later hybrid employees, many shifts towards more authentic leading could be observed from the answers.

It became clear that emotional intelligence is important to each interviewee and that its importance had clearly grown since the start of pandemic lockdowns with employee issues becoming more difficult to perceive and requiring quite deep understanding of each individual employee's personality.

Everyone, except the line manager D, mentioned sacrificing work efficiency in favor of maintaining team trust and relationships but everyone, this time also with D included also talked about doing it while balancing on a fine line between effectiveness and employee annoyance. Answers clearly show that extra efforts to also endorse organizational citizenship in addition to team bonds tip the scales far too much towards the annoyance part, and even if such efforts when successful could be beneficial to some employees, they were not considered worth it by the interviewees.

Every interviewee, except once again the line manager D, avoided the term manager as much as possible even though it was the official title of some, in favor of calling themselves leaders which is more in line of their actual work.

When it came to meetings, usage of web cameras and text chats, some considerations with authentic characteristics showed themselves most clearly. Interviewee E realized mid-interview how much easily approachable the less-formal text chats can make him even if it complicates his work, with everyone else more or less agreeing that as informal as possible is for the best of the employee. The topic of remote meetings and web cameras once again brought up the fine line that needs to be balanced on, this time with the positive gains going against annoyance and awkwardness. One interviewee had come to realize that some employees might need to put more effort into their appearances for short meetings and had thus decided not to demand webcam usage.

## 5 DISCUSSION

From the results of the interviews the role of emotional intelligence and even the increased demand for it in virtual leading seems apparent. While the topic is complicated and analyzing the results depends heavily on the perspective, it seems reasonable to claim that indeed methods with some characteristics of authentic leadership have emerged in Finnish virtual leaders. The field of tech was quite uniquely equipped to seamlessly handle a transition into remote working and thus skipped the friction period found in on many other fields of business of finding the right ICT solutions, acquiring necessary technology and training personnel in the use of them, the problems solved in tech industry yesterday might be problems faced somewhere else tomorrow in addition to remote and hybrid work appearing to both be things that can no longer be stopped, and thus, important to study.

This thesis sought to examine problems remote employees are facing and potential managerial level solutions to those problems. The solution offered in this study is Authentic leadership and while this study recognizes that no leadership theory is complete and applicable on its own, the interviews done provide some support in favor of the validity of authentic leadership in virtual leading.

### 5.1 Managerial implications

When comparing presented potential employee issues (Orhan et al., 2016) to the results of the interviews, being only the managerial perspective, some things appear to be missing. This might suggest that even though tech as a field has had many years to mature in virtual leading, there still might be underlying personal employee issues such as marital happiness and the life side of work-life balance, that could further provide increases in employee productivity and engagement if leaders recognize these people and situations correctly. For example, a person working fully remotely with low social needs might still sometimes need a person to talk to and if there is nobody else, the leader might have to be the one to handle this part of the employee's life as well.

Majority of the collected data heavily emphasizes that a virtual leader nowadays is absolutely required to know each subordinate personally to at least some degree if any

kind of remote or hybrid work model is being implemented. While this seemed like an obvious thing to the interviewees, almost like me asking if water is indeed wet, I believe it to be still a, if not foreign concept, at least not properly understood and implemented in majority of the fields of business. A big thing that continuously came up in the interviews is the concept of annoyance and frustration in the employees. Doing anything collectively and forcing unneeded participants to take part in whatever meetings, according to this study, always does more harm than good and does not serve in bolstering team spirit and as Leonardelli (2022) also suggests, is only managerial level self-assurance instead of something that actually helps. Seemingly the only remedy for this is knowing each employee and thinking every meeting through as to who invite and why.

Organizational citizenship was something no interviewee was specifically worried about, which seemingly supports the claims of Marshall et al. (2007), as every interviewee was focused purely on intra-team and subordinate-superior relationships believing them to be enough for organizational commitment as well, further suggesting that if leaders focus on creating and maintaining team bonds and trust it is sufficient to keep employee citizenship levels reasonably high as well.

A lack of understanding as to why employees might not want to use webcams became apparent throughout the interviews, however the counterpoint is very good. If a focus is only on reducing employee fatigue from webcam usage as described by Shockley et al. (2021) the increased lack of non-verbal cues in some discussions might prove too steep of a cost. The combination of examined literature material and interviews here does lead this study to suggest leaders to be more mindful of when and who to demand webcam usage from, and consider things like women having to put a disproportionate amount of work into looking like what is expected for a short video chat, as was also noted by interviewee E.

The last long quote from interviewee E in the result section is in my opinion an amazing way to say what Leonardelli (2022) also attempts to get at. No matter how close you seem to get a leader must always think about oneself and subordinates as “us and them” and not just “us”. I personally find this to be a prime example of the kind of authentic leadership Leonardelli describes.

Interestingly, when on the topic of webcam usage every single interviewee stated they approach remote meetings like they do on-location ones when it comes to appearance, but employees seem reluctant to turn theirs on due to not having put in the same effort in their appearance as they would for co-located meeting. One of the basic principles of authentic leadership is leading by example, by talking about one's own worries to solicit similar response from the employees. It might be possible that simply having leader put less effort into their appearances would be the method necessary to encourage more webcam usage.

From the results gained in this thesis, even though the scope of it must be recognized small, it seems clear that methods of being an authentic leader in virtual environment have naturally been emerging in the studied field even before the pandemic lockdowns and remote work and the importance of which has only been enhanced by the switch to remote and hybrid work models. Examining the unclear lines of emotional intelligence, its importance and applications is a difficult task as definitions differ from person to person, it however seems clear that both the studies presented, and the interviews done in this thesis heavily emphasize its growing importance in the art of virtual leading.

## **5.2 Study suggestions**

Matters like authentic leaderships impact on employee psychological wellbeing and group identities within teams were beyond the scope of a study examining only the managerial point of view. A follow up study on subordinate point of view would greatly enhance the result of both studies.

One interviewee had indeed emergently begun introducing manual increasing of task interdependence (Zhang, Zhao, et al., 2022) to create tighter bonds within a team, further suggesting it to be a reasonable method to be introduced in many other similar situations as well and some others attempted similar things as not work related but rather discussion or training-based activities. All interviewees most certainly recognized the importance of high-quality interpersonal relationships but did not have a sustainable solution for lack thereof. Further studies on this topic specifically would appear to be extremely important.

As mentioned in the previous section, it would be plausible to suggest leader wearing less formal clothing might be the needed encouragement for employees to turn on their webcams when appearances do not actually matter for the task at hand. A study on how far such authenticity and moving away from stereotypical business standards when it comes to language usage, clothing, and such, can be taken before it actually starts causing substantial damage to leaders' authority in remote or hybrid setting would be extremely interesting and useful for current organizations.

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