Remote Management as the New Long-Distance Relationship

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The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 created many situations in which organizations shifted employees to remote work. While research has been done on managing remote workers effectively, there are other relationships in which distance separates the individuals – such as Long Distance Romantic Relationships (LDRRs). This paper examines the research on the concepts and techniques that enable LDRRs to be effective. It suggests that many of these principles can assist organizations and managers in increasing the effectiveness of remote working relationships. Specific techniques include the quality and openness of communications and understanding employees' preferred methods for showing appreciation. Suggestions are provided to assist managers in meeting the challenges of managing remote workers.

Keywords: remote work, long distance relationships

INTRODUCTION

In popular culture today, the long-distance relationship is often romanticized. And as the COVID-19 pandemic propelled much of the global population into what became a professional and personal virtual existence (excluding the essential workers who were on the front lines throughout the pandemic), that romanticism was amplified exponentially. Suddenly, popular media outlets were beginning to pour out content on managing long-distance romantic, platonic, and familial relationships. Whether it's the Times article "Can a Long Distance Relationship Work in a Pandemic?" (Burns, 2021) with its research-backed suggestions for a long-distance romantic relationship (LDRR) maintenance or Buzzfeed's gif-filled, friendly advice-style piece "17 Easy Ways To Keep The Spark In Your Long-Distance Relationship"(Bird, 2020), the world has become consumed with how to develop and maintain relationships separate by long distances, literally and figuratively.

Anyone who has ever been involved in a romantic relationship will likely agree long-distance romantic relationships are vastly different than proximity. There's a plethora of literature about the difference between long-distance and primarily in-person relationships and how to navigate a successful LDRR (e.g., Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Kelmer, Stanley & Markmen, 2012; Staples, Hulland, & Higgins, 1999). And while the pandemic has begun to slow and the world has started to adjust to more consistent virtual

communication across many facets of life, the struggles of our new virtual reality have only begun to be addressed.

That issue is specifically prevalent within the workforce today, as companies forced to "go remote" during the pandemic now find that returning to their previous "normal" is unlikely. A McKinsey Research study of 800 corporate executives globally found "38 percent of respondents expect their remote employees to work two or more days a week away from the office after the pandemic, compared to 22 percent of respondents surveyed before" (Lund, Madgavkar, Manyika, & Smit, 2020). An additional 19 percent of respondents indicated they expect employees to work three or more days remotely. The ability to work remotely relies heavily on the occupation: finance, insurance, professional and technical services, and management are among the sectors with the highest potential for remote work, according to McKinsey (Lund, Madgavkar, Manyika, & Smit, 2020). It is interesting that management, which relies so heavily on the interactions between people, would be rated so highly in regards to remote work potential. How can a profession so focused on the connections and interactions one has with others be done so easily through a screen?

Much of the recent management literature examining how COVID-19 has impacted the workforce has brought to light how managers are struggling to connect with and direct their remote or hybrid employees (e.g., Bailey & Breslin, 2021; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; White, 2021). As managers and management theorists alike begin to speculate and collect data regarding how management must change in the new, more virtual work environments in which firms operate, there seems to be a significant lack of actionable items for managers on which to capitalize. Unfortunately, it may take quite some time for studies to begin to highlight what makes a manager of remote employees more or less successful. But today's managers can't wait.

While there may not be many tips or insights on how to successfully work with remote employees, a significant amount of data and literature outlines how to have a successful long-distance romantic relationship. These existing frameworks have assisted couples in maintaining and thriving within their relationships for quite some time; the advice has only improved as the world has gone digital and been graced with more available media channels to stay connected than ever before. If couples can make it work across distances and time zones, then perhaps managers can learn from those who can successfully maintain a long-distance relationship. The purpose of this paper is to examine possible methods managers can use to navigate their relationships with remote and hybrid employees by emulating the actions and practices of those in successful long-distance romantic relationships?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Long-Distance Romantic Relationships

According to Stafford (2005), long-distance relationships can be described as those where "communication opportunities are restricted (in the view of the individuals involved) because of geographic parameters and the individuals within the relationship have expectations of continued close connection." There are many types of long-distance relationships, such as long-distance familial relationships, romantic unions of unmarried individuals, platonic relationships that begin in person and continue after distance is introduced, etc. (Stafford, Maintaining long-distance and cross-residential relationships, 2005). The comparisons within this text will be based on long-distance romantic relationships. Merriam-Webster defines a relationship as "a romantic or passionate attachment" (n.d.).

From 2000 to 2017, the number of married American couples 18 and older who lived apart from their spouses increased from approximately 2.7 million to roughly 3.9 million (Pinkser, 2019). This includes those with spouses in the military, living in nursing homes or other care facilities, or incarcerated. Notably, some individuals within this demographic have chosen to live apart from their partners or have to do so due to career differences and similar circumstances.

Sahlstein's study of 20 heterosexual, primarily white couples, most of which had at least one partner enrolled as a student at the undergraduate or graduate level within the Midwest, examined the differences between LDRRs and close proximity relationships (Sahlstein, 2004). Nine of the 20 couples studied had

both partners attend college at separate institutions. Eight had one partner attend school while the other worked in a different location. Three couples reported that both partners worked but in different cities. Across the sample, four of these couples started their relationships long-distance (Sahlstein, 2004). This study provides a strong framework to understand how those in long-distance relationships navigate their times apart versus together, effectively painting a picture of the differences between close-proximity relationships and those that are long-distance. Much of that difference lies within the way these individuals communicate while apart, using many different methods to do so.

The Trials of Long-Distance Romantic Relationships

Sahlstein highlights the fact that "LDRR partners want certainty around their relationships [more than those nearby relationships] due to the abundant gaps between their face-to-face interactions" (Sahlstein E. M., 2006). After all, a lack of face-to-face interaction can cause an individual to miss so much: the body language most rely on to truly understand the feelings of their partner, subtle mannerisms that cannot be detected through virtual communication, the smell, taste, and touch of their loved one, etc. How can couples keep their love alive when they are missing what were once the most fundamental pieces of a healthy relationship?

At the heart of Sahlstein's 2004 study is the notion that with the good comes the bad. For all of the benefits of being apart, there are equal costs to the experience. Those within the study were able to identify "the positive and negative impacts of differentiating their relational and individual lives (i.e., typically equated with their time together and time apart, respectively)" (Sahlstein, 2004). The clear division between the couple as a unit and the two individuals led to partners reporting "being able to negotiate their connection with the partner more effectively and with fewer conflicts" (Sahlstein, 2004), despite the well-known negatives often associated with LDRRs. Furthermore, Sahlstein reported participants who represented proximity relationships were initially more hesitant to discuss the difficulties or issues they experienced than those in LDRRs. This may be because couples within close proximity relationships are not forced to discuss the trajectory of their relationship or other negative topics as often as those in LDRRs due to their greater time together. They may also not experience as many difficulties as those in LDRRs, as they can lean heavily on shows of appreciation like physical touch and acts of service in ways long-distance couples cannot.

Sahlstein's (2004) study found, perhaps unsurprisingly, "being apart constrains being together." The most reported category within this area of experience was the "pressure for quality/positive time," with 46% of the couples indicating that "the time apart creates this extreme need/pressure to have a good time when partners are together" (Sahlstein, 2004). "Constructs unknown" followed at roughly 12%, showing that time apart created uncertainty or unknowns between the couples because they were incapable of sharing experiences and felt a subsequent tension in the forms of jealousy, conflict, etc. As for communication, couples cited communicative strain as a significant factor in their relationship experience. Those in long-distance relationships "spend a significant portion of their time together catching up, discussing the future of the relationship (e.g., 'Where is this relationship going?'), and/or talk about plans for future time together (e.g., 'What are we going to do next time?')" (Sahlstein, 2004). Close proximity couples are afforded more time to merely enjoy being in the moment with their partner, as they're not racing against the clock before they are separated again and can allow their days to move at a more natural pace without having to quickly determine a direction for their relationship. Lastly, the study found the extensive periods couples spend apart can cause them to feel as if they live within "different worlds." Partners may move down conflicting paths and lose their connection or similarities as they grow separately, especially if there is no conscious effort to stay connected (Sahlstein, 2004).

While these issues may seem daunting to those accustomed to in-person relationships, there are benefits uniquely associated with long-distance relationships. Sahlstein labeled this area of experience "being apart enables being together" (2004). The main positive to long-distance romantic relationships lies in the ability for autonomy and individuality that many in close proximity relationships may not feel. Being together in person for copious periods can lead couples to feel as if they must fill all of their spare time with their partner. There is pressure to not dedicate too much time to other areas of one's life that do not include their

committed partner, such as one's career or other personal interests. Those in LDRRs can do things while separated that benefit their time together, with separation being the most cited category that positively impacts a couple's time apart. "It can be focused, relational time" when those in LDRRs are finally together, Sahlstein noted. "Being apart allows partners to accomplish certain tasks that in turn allow for the couple to accomplish other things (e.g., relational 'stuff') when they are together (Sahlstein, 2004). Better yet, those who cannot be near their partner frequently are often more appreciative of the time they do have, both in person or through distanced communication. The openness between long-distance romantic partners was also cited as a positive aspect of being apart within the study, as partners reported "during the time apart they get to talk more (mainly about the relationship, but not necessarily only this) and thus the time together is better because of that openness. Also, the time apart can create situations in which they talk about the relationship" (Sahlstein, 2004). As previously seen in the initial hesitations of those nearby relationships to open up in front of one another, this openness is a more common aspect of LDRRs.

Successful Communication in Long-Distance Romantic Relationships

Communication is key. Regardless of how trite this phrase may seem, it is a significant factor in successful LDRRs. In 2002, Dainton and Aylor produced a study whose "results suggest a prominent role for mediated communication in the maintenance of distance relationships" (2002). The study assessed the frequency and maintenance of communication of 114 individuals in LDRRs and the effect of those factors on the "relational characteristics" of the couple, such as satisfaction and trust (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). Within their research, the team found that oral communication channels are considered functionally equal, while the written communication channels they assessed at the time (labeled Internet and letters) were also deemed equivalent. The same cannot be said across written and verbal communication, as phone calls were not found to be functionally equivalent to letters. Bringing this research into today's more technologically advanced world, letters likely translate to emails and text-messages with Internet representing social media.

Phone calls were found to be particularly vital in maintaining LDRRs, having a significant association with satisfaction and commitment amongst couples (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). Telephone use was also significantly related to assurances, openness, and shared tasks. This may be because phone conversations offer more immediacy and insights into the inflection and tone of a partner's words. Tephone use was "more often associated with using maintenance strategies than other channels" (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). However, "Internet use was strongly associated with trust, a key factor in any romantic relationship" (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). There was only one significant correlation found between in-person interaction and overall maintenance efforts. However, the authors note this could be because those surveyed were all in LDRRs and, therefore may have differing uses of face-to-face interactions than those within close proximity relationships (Dainton & Aylor, 2002).

As to be expected, Dainton and Aylor also highlighted that "certain communication channels might better meet particular gratification needs" (2002). Sending a break-up email will likely be less well-received than an in-person conversation or phone call. This is not true for all scenarios: it is important to note all individuals have personal communication preferences that should be considered. One partner could have extreme anxiety about phone calls, while another may prefer using social media to send written communications instead of texting or email. Personal choice and proclivity will always play a role in the communication of those in relationships, whether they're close in proximity or not. Still, Dainton and Aylor drew the overall conclusion that "mediated communication use in distance relationships [clearly] affects relational maintenance and perceptions of success" (2002).

Appreciation

Channel selection is not the only communication choice couples must make when distanced; what is shared through those avenues overshadows all other hurdles concerning long-distance communication. While it's clear distanced couples spend most of their conversational time on the logistics of their lives, separate and together, few individuals generally want to stay in a relationship that is "all work and no play." Showing love and appreciation to one's partner is crucial to fostering a lasting and healthy relationship.

As it happens, showing appreciation is also a critical factor in achieving employee happiness and retention – two issues prevalent in today's digital workplace. Chapman and White highlighted in their book "The 5 Languages of Appreciation: Empowering Organizations by Encouraging People" (2019) that 64% of Americans who leave their jobs indicate they do so because they are not feeling appreciated, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Simply put, authentic appreciation and recognition from coworkers and management leads to increased employee engagement, decreasing turnover and raising productivity (Chapman & White, 2019; White, 2017; Mann & Dvorak, 2016). A lower turnover rate and increased outputs benefit a business' bottom line; At the same time, many may believe caring for the happiness of their employees is not worth the effort, anything that can bring about a boost in a business' profits is certainly worth a try. Especially when showing appreciation often does not require a cent to be spent.

Much of the literature on showing appreciation and fostering love between couples draws upon the five love languages. While these languages correlate to the workplace as the five languages of appreciation, the categories remain the same: quality time, acts of service, tangible gifts, words of affirmation, and physical touch (Chapman & White, 2011; White, P., 2017).

- Words of Affirmation: Oral or written praise and acknowledgment.
- Quality Time: Time spent with an individual one-on-one or in group settings.
- Acts of Service: Showing appreciation through actions, such as helping complete a task or offering to do something for someone.
- Tangible Gifts: Being given a physical item or experience.
- Physical Touch: Using touch to express affection, closeness, or appreciation.

The Motivating by Appreciation (MBA) Inventory is an assessment based upon the languages mentioned above of appreciation. The MBA Inventory aims to assess an individual's primary and secondary language of appreciation, as well as their least preferred. Physical touch is not included within the assessment, so as to "avoid negative reactions by individuals who have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace" (White, 2017). Data from the MBA Inventory was analyzed in White's (2017) paper, "How do employees want to be shown appreciation? Results from 100,000 employees indicated that of the four languages assessed, nearly half of those who responded cited words of affirmation as their primary preference. This can be done orally or through writing, in private one-on-one conversations, or in front of one's team or a large group. Quality time was next in terms of preference, with approximately a quarter of employees surveyed citing it as their primary appreciation language. Acts of service was close behind, with roughly 23%. The least chosen language was receiving rewards or tangible gifts: over 90% of employees indicated this is not the primary way in which they would like to shown appreciation at work. While many rewards or recognition programs crafted by businesses may monetarily to solve their employee engagement or loyalty problems, these organizations seem to be wasting their energy (and resources).

Remote Management and Its Differences From On-Site

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the discourse surrounding remote work from the management perspective seemed to say mangers prefer employees to be on-site, citing reasons such as a loss of control over their employees due to not being able to physically see them working (Manocherhi & Pinkerton, 2003). Other management concerns that spawn from remote work include a manager's inability to easily determine if employees have too much or too little work, whether or not they are struggling or need feedback, or if there exists any conflict between coworkers they may need to assist in resolving (Manocherhi & Pinkerton, 2003). These issues have led to a general lack of confidence in managers to be able to effectively do their jobs when dealing with remote workers: in fact, nearly 40% of 215 individuals in supervisory or management positions surveyed by a team at Harvard Business Review (HBR) "expressed low self-confidence in their ability to manage workers remotely. (Parker, Knight, & Keller, 2020).

Concerns over remote work are not one-sided. While many employees may love the freedoms that come with working from home, including no commute, the ability to accomplish tasks like laundry or dishes throughout the day, etc., struggles still accompany being out of office. Being off-site may lead employees to feel isolated or a lack of community within the workplace. They may also be concerned about their lack

of visibility with managers: not being physically seen may lead them to worry their hard work goes unnoticed, causing remote employees to fret about being passed up for promotions or special opportunities due to their lack of physical office presence. This could be especially true of hybrid workplaces, where some employees are on-site and others are remote. Competition between these two groups could cause a rift within the workplace culture as well(Manocherhi & Pinkerton, 2003).

Trust is also a large issue between remote employees and management. And thanks to COVID-19, remote managers are experiencing trust issues far more frequentl(Parker, Knight, & Keller, 2020). It might be natural for managers to assume employees who are not in office may be less productive, especially without someone to ensure they are on task and appropriately filling their time. However, a McKinsey Research consumer survey in May of 2020 found "41 percent of employees… said they were more productive working remotely than in the office. As employees have gained experience working remotely during the pandemic, their confidence in their productivity has grown, with the number of people saying they worked more productively increasing by 45 percent from April to May" (Lund, Madgavkar, Manyika, & Smit, 2020). Since a decrease in productivity is not a consistent element of remote work, there is very little reason for managers to micromanage their off-site employees. Yet, many employees feel more supervised now than ever. Twenty-one percent of employees surveyed by HBR agreed their supervisor constantly evaluated their performance: the more closely monitored they were, the more likely they were to feel anxiety at work (Parker, Knight, & Keller, 2020). That anxiety can lead to a drop in productivity or happiness within the workplace, which is a quick way to raise turnover rates and decrease results.

Appreciation Preferences for Remote Versus On-Site Employees

Overall, remote employees still preferred words of affirmation as their primary language of appreciation according to a 2021 analysis of White's MBA Inventory (White, 2021). Over 200,000 employees were surveyed and split into two participant groups. Responses collected from 1/1/2013 to 12/31/2019 were considered "pre-COVID-19," whereas those who took the inventory from 4/1/2019 to 2/28/2021 were cited as "During COVID-19" (White, 2021). Responses from remote and on-site employees were compared across all periods and responses from all employees were compared before and during COVID-19.

It should be noted the choice of words of affirmation from remote employees was less frequent than those on-site, as 46.1% of on-site employees selected this language compared to only 39.5% of those who were remote. This shift is likely caused by the greater percentage of remote individuals who cited quality time as their preferred appreciation language, with 35.5% of remote employees selecting this method in comparison to 26.5% of on-site. White posits this change may be due to remote employees' greater sense of isolation from their peers, which "could create a desire for time with others for many employees" (White, 2021). When looking at the preferences of pre-COVID-19 versus during-COVID-19 respondents, quality time increased from 26.7% to 28.4%. It is logical to assume the new separation from their workplaces and the world, caused employees to crave time with their peers in a way they may not have before. This isn't unlike individuals in long-distance relationships, who often learn to appreciate their partners and their time together more thanks to their time separated (Sahlstein E. M., Relating at a distance: Negotiating being together and being apart in long-distance relationships, 2004).

Finally, acts of service still followed quality time for both groups, with remote employees slightly favored tangible gifts at 7.1% compared to on-site's 6.1%. While the rankings of primary languages of appreciation are still the same across remote and on-site employees, both prior to and during COVID-19, the difference in percentages show a shift in both comparisons. With such a short collection time during COVID-19 represented in White's 2021 research, a greater gap between primary language preference across remote and on-site employees could be found as more individuals turn to remote work or remain off-site for longer periods.

LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS AND THE MANAGEMENT OF REMOTE WORKERS

Remote work is here to stay. And while there will surely be a plethora of studies done on what makes a manager most successful when engaging with off-site employees in the years to come, managers

struggling with this shift cannot wait. After all, quality management has the power to "improve remote workers' well-being and performance" (Parker, Knight, & Keller, 2020). With little current research on successful remote management, however, managers must look elsewhere for help. While long-distance romantic relationships may feature an intimacy level that cannot be replicated within the workplace, there is still much managers can learn from those within successful and healthy LDRRs that may assist them in communicating and connecting with their remote employees.

Distance causes many of the same problems for managers as it does for couples: the fear of the unknown, mastering effective virtual communication that offers the same levels of appreciation as face-to-face, pressure for the time spent in person to make up for all the time apart, etc. These problems were found within the Sahlstein study of LDRRs and equally apply to long-distance management. And it is within that study and the literature on LDRRs, managers can find possible responses to their current remote management questions.

Partners within LDRRs deal with the constant unknowns that come with being apart by actively planning their time together to be full of "activities… that help reduce uncertainty and produce shared 'knowns' that can be drawn upon during their time apart. Partners use quality time to negotiate their needs for certainty (e.g., knowing more about one another's lives) and uncertainty (e.g., having fun, exciting time together)" (Sahlstein, 2004). Creating knowns between partners can be recreated within the employee-manager relationship as well. It could also help to assuage much of the isolation employees often feel when working remotely. That isolation can overshadow the benefits of remote work if not properly dealt with (Sahlstein E. M., Relating at a distance: Negotiating being together and being apart in long-distance relationships, 2004) and can cause an employee to feel unappreciated or unimportant.

Face-to-face interactions are not necessary to create knowns. It can be done through many media channels: email, texting, phone conversations, video chats, etc. In the same way couples must discuss their issues and needs more frequently when distanced to increase their security within their relationships, managers should look to do the same. Managers should work to foster the same kind of openness between themselves and their employees that couples in LDRRs cite as a positive aspect of their distance. No matter what channel is chosen to begin developing this openness, the intent of the messaging must be specific: checking in on employees too frequently or without a clear purpose will likely convey a lack of trust, negatively impacting employee performance (Parker, Knight, & Keller, 2020). Managers should be direct with their employees about their concerns over remote work and begin asking questions such as:

- Do employees feel supported? Are they being provided the guidance necessary to feel secure in their jobs?
- What methods of communication are preferred by the employee? Did they choose a remote position because they have severe phone anxiety and prefer written communications, or do they enjoy video chatting with their team members to get as close to the on-site experience as possible?
- What types of appreciation do employees prefer? Are there individuals on the team who greatly miss being on-site because their primary language of appreciation is quality time? Do those individuals who prefer words of affirmation want that communicated in a large group setting, or do they prefer one-on-one interactions?
- What boundaries can be set that assuage the stressors that come with working from home, like constantly feeling "on" or the feelings of guilt that may come with accomplishing home tasks throughout the workday?
- If potential conflicts arise between coworkers or in general, do employees know what procedures to follow to make these known? If there is no strong relationship between the manager and employee, does the individual feel they have any avenue to report potential issues?

While these conversations may not have been warranted in the days of water cooler talks and cubicle check-ins, these are critical to ensuring employees do not confuse a manager's potentially frequent virtual communications with a lack of trust or feel unappreciated by managers who may not check in as much or

in the ways an employee prefers. It's natural to feel hesitant to hold such candid conversations, as was seen in the close proximity couples represented in Sahlstein's study who had a more difficult time discussing potential issues together, but it could be the key to fostering a stronger bond between manager and employee.

Many of these topics of conversation may seem inherently negative, as it can be draining to discuss the hardships of COVID-19 or the trials of remote work with others. However progress is unlikely if managers cannot both highlight the good and address the bad. Barge and Oliver found "evidence that negative conversations and emotionality can create constructive experiences within organizational life" (2003). Bringing these negative emotions to the forefront of some conversations can assist individuals in expressing their unhappy feelings and keep them from becoming "stuck;" not allowing employees to address these issues within the organization can cause them to have an increased focus on the past or waste their energy on blame-placing instead of generating "new ways of acting in the future" to deter negative situations or feelings (Barge & Oliver, 2003). No one is looking for the term "manager" to become synonymous with "therapist," of course. But, remote employees are offered far fewer opportunities to naturally show the hardships they are experiencing in the workplace or at home that may impact their ability to produce. It is up to managers to find new ways to detect these potential difficulties and bring them to light in open and direct communication.

Communication strain is a hurdle for any who primarily connect through media channels. Long-distance couples spend a majority of their time catching up and trying to feel like a part of their partner's life in which they cannot physically play a role. That time rather closely resembles what most managers would call a check-in meeting: one of a million virtual invites employees must now attend for management to feel they have a grip on what their teams are doing to ease their insecurities. In fact, Harvard Business School found through an analysis of over 3 million people in 16 cities globally that employees participate in more meetings now than prior to COVID-19, many of which are unnecessary (Kost, 2020).

Fortune found the research "shows it takes 25 minutes to return your concentration back to an original task after a significant interruption [like a meeting]… [and one survey found] 65% of workers said that meetings keep them from completing their work" (Circei, 2021). It seems counterintuitive to disrupt the flow of someone's work when managers are already so concerned with remote employees' productivity. Besides, all business professionals know one should never make a meeting out of what could have been an email. Or a post on a company chat room. Perhaps a text could suffice. The opportunities are endless now; studies have shown oral communication channels are functionally equal and written channels are not nearly as impersonal or unpreferable as was once thought (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). Face-to-face interactions are no longer the only method of effective communication. Nor are in person interactions the only way to foster an open and trusting relationship or show appreciation. In fact, some employees may feel just as valued when receiving a "great job" text as others do when being openly praised in a large meeting. While it may feel like going against the grain to begin ditching the video chat for a more casual email or to ask employees candidly about their feelings towards a manager's efforts, overcoming these initial discomforts will be worth the benefits of fostering positive relationships with remote employees.

Long Distance Relationships and Remote Management: A Critical Assessment

It is first important to note that much of the literature on romantic relationships overall focuses heavily on close-proximity couples. Historically, the statistics and literature surrounding LDRRs and their frequency have come from college relationships and a majority white demographic (Sahlstein, 2004). These demographics clearly do not represent the world of remote workers today or those who comprise LDRRs. Nuances could be found across gender, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, etc. and more inclusive and diverse research would need to be done within the LDRR space to identify these potential differences.

Sahlstein also found those nearby relationships and those in LDRRs both report "average to high relational satisfaction despite the obvious differences in contact frequencies and quantity" (2004). This goes against much of the popular beliefs about long-distance romantic relationships today. Several explanations could be posed, including the tendencies of those in LDRRs to idealize their relationship and their partner and the ability to turn the negatives of close proximity relationships into positives when distanced, like

more time to commit to one's career aspirations or friendships (Sahlstein, 2004). Partners in LDRRs are also more optimistic about the future of their relationships, as those within LDRRs are more likely to place a greater emphasis on both the good characteristics of the relationship and their interactions with their partner (Stafford & Reske, 1990). This is not likely the same for those in remote work situations, as the need to idealize one's job would not be nearly as strong as the need to romanticize one's relationship. There also is not the same level of loyalty between an individual and their workplace as found between couples. While many may say they are married to the job, the phrase is not "All you need is work," is it?

CONCLUSION

Comparing the management of remote employees to the maintenance of long-distance romantic relationships may seem like a stretch, but unprecedented times call for unique solutions. The lines between work and personal life are often blurry for remote workers, and perhaps managers want to steer clear of further crossing those boundaries. But the research shows that fostering more trust and openness within a connection when distance is involved is crucial to the success of that union. Or employee-manager relationship, in this case. Asking new, tough questions and determining an employee's preferred communication method despite the strong desire to recreate the face-to-face experience whenever possible could be incredibly advantageous for managers. Overall, this paper aimed to provide managers insights they can capitalize on to help boost their own performance and keep their on- and off-site employees productive in the same way couples in LDRRs use these techniques to be better partners and make a better pair.

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