

Distance management increases supervisors' workload

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Johanna Saarinen, who will be defending her dissertation in Aalto University's School of Business, investigated distance management and virtual management in her doctoral thesis in the field of Organization and Management.

'Distance management and virtual management increase supervisors' pressures and workload in multinational companies. The work of supervisors is clearly more difficult in global corporations where team members work around the world in different time zones and diverse cultures in comparison with teams whose members primarily work physically close to one another,' Saarinen says.

Based on the doctoral study, even the most high-end communication technology cannot replace meeting face-to-face. A lot of important communication also takes place in corridors and around coffee makers. It is good to remotely manage concrete tasks related to work assignments, but it is better to handle many issues, for instance, those related to the work community, in face-to-face communication. Presence was considered to build trust between the supervisor and the employee. Transferring energy and motivating employees was also considered difficult in remote teams. Saarinen interviewed 36 supervisors for her doctoral study.

'It was also apparent in my doctoral research that regardless of the fact that the young generations, the so-called diginatives, are skilled in using communication technology, they still need a lot of personal support,

feedback and presence. My research also confirmed that technology often fails and connection is often broken in virtual meetings, which makes working difficult," Saarinen explains.

Supervisors suffer from constant feeling of insufficiency

According to the doctoral study, supervisors often struggle with tough and often superhuman expectations. The expectations come from upper and lower levels, particularly to middle management. The goals set are difficult to reach and a high quality of management is expected at the same time. Employees demand the supervisors to be present as well as coach and listen to them. Supervisors also expect a lot from themselves. Indeed, the supervisors participating in the study felt unable to provide as good supervisory work as they would like and what is expected of them.

'Nevertheless, [supervisors](#) are true everyday survivors who work long hours, constantly in hurry and under pressure. All in all, efficient time management and timetables as well as creating own best practices help them in coping with both their demanding jobs as well as combining work and family,' Johanna Saarinen says.

Provided by Aalto University

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