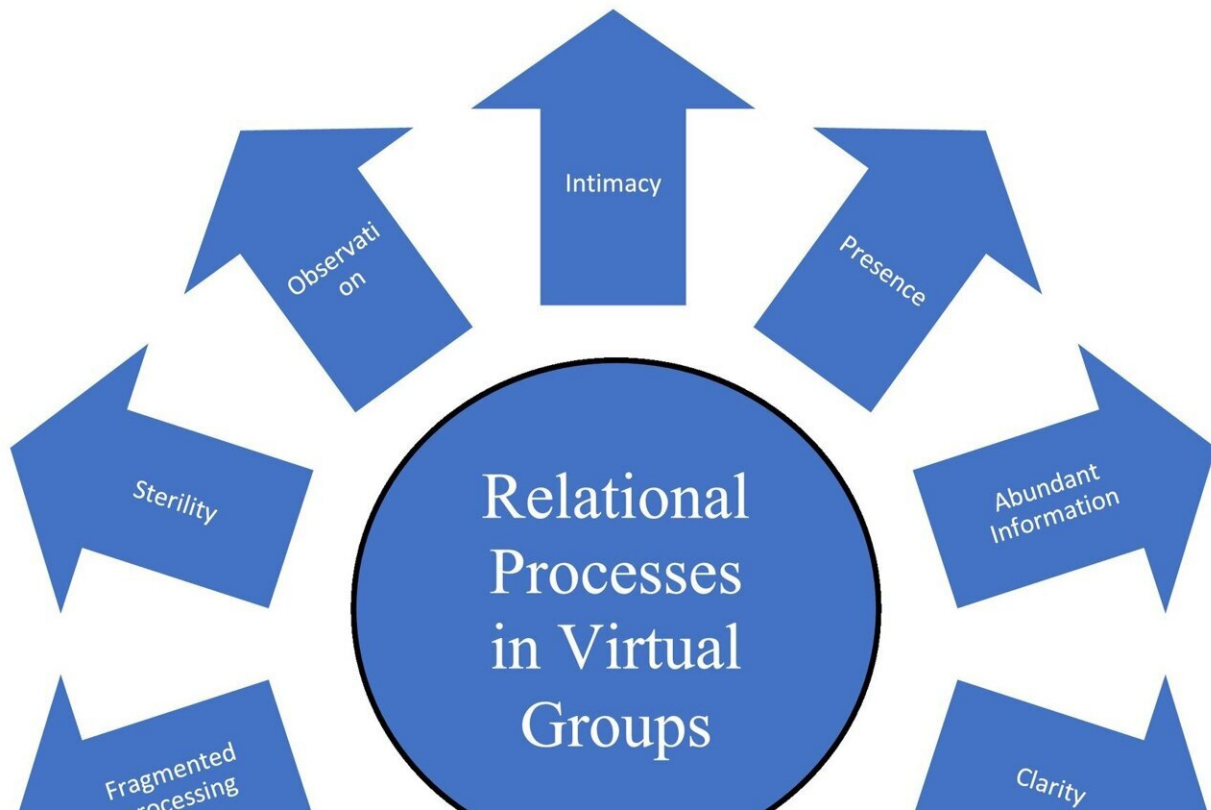


How remote work affects managers

February 15 2023



Paradoxical tensions in facilitating relational processes in virtual video groups.
Credit: *Internet Interventions* (2021). DOI: 10.1016/j.invent.2021.100445

The COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted the way we work, changing the habits to which we had become accustomed. Today, working from home at least part of the week—or from anywhere else but the office—has become the new normal. Workplaces have discovered the

efficiency of remote work, and employees have made it a standard request when negotiating with employers.

Until now, research on the topic has dealt mainly with the psychological effects of [remote work](#) on individuals and teams. In the current study, Dr. Yael Ben David of Reichman University's Baruch Ivcher School of Psychology investigated the implications of remote work on the managerial level, in light of the fact that the transition to remote work forced them to grapple with new dilemmas and hence to reinvent their roles.

In the framework of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with about 30 managers from different sectors, who had experienced the transition from office-based work to remote work during the period of the pandemic. The managers were invited to tell the researchers about the transformation process from the moment it began, with the outbreak of COVID-19, to the time at which the interview was held (during the third wave of the coronavirus in Israel), at which point most of them had already established a remote work arrangements with their teams.

The findings of the study indicate that the transition to remote work gave rise to paradoxical tensions between opposing elements in managerial work.

The first [tension](#) raised between the need to intensify the supervision over employees, and the fear of losing the trust-based relationship with them.

The second tension evoked between the closeness to workers [domestic environment](#) and the need to keep professional boundaries, which became harder in the absence of geographical ones.

The third tension found between the traditional managerial concept of

the manager as the knowledgeable authority and a new and uncertain remote environment in which the manager has no expertise or understanding of how to work effectively.

"Our findings showed that managers demonstrated two main strategies for dealing with these tensions," says Dr. Yael Ben David of the Ivcher School of Psychology at Reichman University.

"On the one hand, there were managers who perceived the extremes of the paradox as opposing one another, and chose to focus on one of the elements over the other. On the other hand, there were those who managed to hold the paradoxical tension at both ends—that is, they found a creative way to contain the conflicting tensions in their work. The latter found innovative ways to deal with the changing reality and adapt their managerial role accordingly."

"Managers who chose to tighten their supervision over their employees while ignoring the possible damage to workers sense of trust, encountered negative reactions and disengagement on the part of employees. However, those who tried to maintain supervision while preserving trust by positioning themselves as helpers and enablers to their workers were better able to support their employees."

"Managers who failed to pay attention to the blurring of the boundaries between home and work created an undefined and draining environment, in contrast to managers who understood the need to formulate new boundaries for remote work and created needs-based boundaries for employees rather than location-based boundaries, allowing them to work from home while maintaining their [personal space](#)."

"These managers, for example, adjusted work and rest hours according to the [employee](#)'s family or personal considerations, giving them the opportunity to rest in the middle of the day in cases where they had to

work in the evening. Finally, managers who perceived their lack of knowledge as contrasting their authority, tended to feel powerless in their managerial role."

"Some even tried to maintain a façade of certainty in an uncertain reality, which resulted in personal burnout. Other managers, in contrast, were willing to admit to their employees that they didn't 'know it all,' were more willing to jointly learn with the employees how to handle the new reality."

In sum, a remote working environment requires [managers](#) to understand the mental gap that now exists between them and their employees. Fostering trust-based relationships, establishing needs-based working routines, and initiating a joint learning process with employees, may improve the manager-employee relationship, in spite of the distance.

The paper is published in the journal *Internet Interventions*.

More information: Yael Ben-David et al, Lost in the matrix: Dialectical tensions in facilitating virtual video groups during COVID-19 pandemic, *Internet Interventions* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.invent.2021.100445](#)

Provided by Reichman University

Citation: How remote work affects managers (2023, February 15) retrieved 13 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-02-remote-affects.html>

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