



A. de Saint Céran (C&S Partners): "We are not living a real teleworking situation"

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Through her international career as a Human Resources specialist in various industrial groups, Agnès de Saint Céran has acquired a solid experience of remote collaboration between intercultural teams. She takes an informed look on work organisation and the role of the manager during this lockdown.

Leaders League. How do companies live with the introduction of massive telework?

Agnès de Saint Céran. In reality, we are not in a real teleworking situation today. The latter involves working normally but this is not the case now. It's been a brutal flip-flop, not everybody has the proper equipment, parents have to look after their children at the same time... I note that the change is still going rather well from the point of view of teams as well as companies. Those who adapt best are precisely those who have become aware that it is not normal teleworking. They therefore reacted with a few mechanisms but also restrictions, such as setting up time slots without meetings or phone calls. Many people face difficulties to disconnect. Yet, this particular period does not relieve the employer of its obligations in this respect.

What are the consequences of this particular situation for managers?

It is about reassuring them and accompanying them. And more especially as they are also asked to detect people who are not living well the situation, to be very attentive. It is a real mission of psycho-social risks prevention that is entrusted to them. It involves them taking very proactive approaches: maintaining daily contacts, organizing coffee break in team remotely, etc. Maintaining the link is central, its absence creates a definite risk for team performance and health. It also seems that lockdown and remote work can be an opportunity to better work in collaboration. We noticed in some cases that the formalisation work was of better quality and that the group exchanges, could be improved, constrained by the digital tool: better listening, easier way to speak for the more reserved people, behind their camera or their microphone. All of this is to be confirmed, of course, but these are interesting first observations.

How to be a good leader in such circumstances?

The topic is obviously complex. If I refer to my own experience in remote management in intercultural situations, the lack of non-verbal communication makes it difficult to establish a trustful relationship. In these conditions, it is primarily a matter of being "readable".

Predictable, clear, understandable. The leaders who inspire the loyalty of their remote teams are those who make the effort to adopt a simple style of communication, and to remain direct in the transmission of instructions. It is also about being approachable. It is essential. And that means being able to transmit a certain vulnerability, to assume its flaws. Otherwise, the teams do not dare to report information. This approachability is transmitted in the attention given to others and the real interest expressed towards the teams. It is the expression of true generosity, which crosses this distance like cultures.

Do you often exchange with peers or leaders in the same sector? What do these exchanges bring you?

I discovered all the fun and richness of networking in China, where this practice is the norm. I recently joined C&S Partners' Advisory Board, a consulting firm founded by people with whom I share convictions around responsible, authentic and impactful leadership. It is a very rich opportunity to be able to meet on concrete themes, regularly, with people from various backgrounds to share and try to bring out ideas, something new.

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