VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP

Going the Distance to Manage Your Teams

WHITEPAPER

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As more employees work virtually and more organizations operate partially or totally virtually, a new type of corporate leadership is required—virtual leadership.

Technology has brought unprecedented levels of productivity, efficiency, and convenience into the workplace. But technology has also brought with it a variety of challenges that leaders have to address as more employees work virtually from remote offices, their homes, and on the road. In addition, creating a work environment that feels cohesive across an entire global organization while taking regional differences into account requires exceptional internal communication and management skills.

Today's virtual leader understands that new tools address these challenges and more. For example, a virtual communications platform can help virtual leaders by providing new models for communication, interaction, and engagement. From training employees to marketing new products, virtual communication solutions are cost-effective, with a high ROI.

As the world's leading provider of webcasting and virtual environment solutions, ON24 is pleased to sponsor this ASTD research report, *Virtual Leadership: Going the Distance to Manage Your Teams*; it resonates well with ON24's focus on innovative virtual communications solutions. This report will provide organizations with a view of the current status of virtual leadership in the enterprise, including strategies and recommendations for virtual leaders.

About ON24 Virtual Talent Development

ON24 supports enterprises' need for global virtual talent development with its Virtual Talent Development Suite. This solution enables businesses to manage every stage of the employee development lifecycle, from talent acquisition and new-hire onboarding to employee training and leadership development.

Virtual Learning Environments

The ON24 Virtual Learning Environment is being used by leading companies to provide engaging training programs for onboarding; leadership and professional development; and employee, sales, and partner training. By combining virtual training centers, live webcasts, social learning tools, and other web-based collaboration tools, the ON24 Virtual Learning Environment creates a highly adaptable and engaging learning experience.

Training and Certification Webcasts

ON24's webcasting platform is used extensively for live and on-demand online training. ON24's high-quality video, customization, and interactivity functionalities allow customers to tailor the learning experience to their specific requirements. The platform integrates testing and certification modules, providing a turnkey online training solution that is accessible from any device, without downloads.

About ON24, Inc.

ON24, the virtual communications platform for the global enterprise, provides interactive, impactful cloud-based solutions that drive outstanding results. ON24 offers a broad and innovative product portfolio, including webcasting, virtual events, and virtual environments, accessible from any device and supported by robust reporting and analytics. Applications for the ON24 platform include user conferences, company town hall meetings, and virtual talent development.

More than 800 organizations, including IBM, Merck, Unilever, Deloitte, Amazon and SAP, rely on ON24. The company is headquartered in San Francisco, with offices throughout the world. For more information, visit: http://www.ON24.com.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The work we do, how we do it, and who we interact with are perpetually evolving. The work day is no longer just 9 to 5, and coworkers and team members include more than those who we see daily; "telecommuting" is now part of our everyday vocabulary. While teaching traditional leadership courses at the AMA about five or six years ago, Donna Dennis, the managing director of Leadership Solutions Consulting, noticed the increasing number of participants who expressed that they have staff who they have never met, because those staff members work virtually. The participants also felt that these traditional leadership skills would not work to help manage their virtual teams. From this point forward, she realized that training would have to be different for these leaders.

Virtual leaders and leaders with staff in other countries "are finding ways to do to things differently for remote leaders," Dennis says. Skill, as well as flexibility, is needed to make virtual leaders productive and effective. The virtual leader must be able to guide his or her team regardless of location. Karen Sobel-Lojeski, an industry specialist in technology and society, talks about different factors that determine virtual distance, which can be defined as "the perceived isolation of members in a team that relies on electronic communications." The factors can be categorized into physical, operational, and affinity distance. These categories are defined as:

» **Physical distance:** separated by location.

» **Operational distance:** separation dictated by the type and appropriate use of communication (for example, the team's ability to meet in person during crucial parts of a deadline), demands on other team members, technological agility.

» **Affinity distance:** separation caused by cultural differences and communications styles among members.

Virtual leaders, particularly those with staff in different countries, face these obstacles daily in working together and maintaining the bottom line.

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Working With a Virtual Staff

Ninety-nine percent of all respondents indicated that either all or some of the employees in their organization have the opportunity to work virtually, on either an as needed, set-schedule, or full-time basis (see Figure 1). From this total, only 13 percent of respondents said that "yes, all employees" in their organization have the opportunity to work virtually, and 86 percent said "yes, some employees can." According to Keather Snyder of AchieveGlobal, 97 percent of organizations report that they will be increasing virtual work or keeping with the status quo, so the number of employees that work from home all the time may increase.

FIGURE 1:

OPPORTUNITY TO WORK VIRTUALLY

Does your organization's staff have the opportunity to work virtually (either as needed, set-schedule, or full-time)?

- 1% No
- 13% Yes—all employees
- 86% Yes—some employees
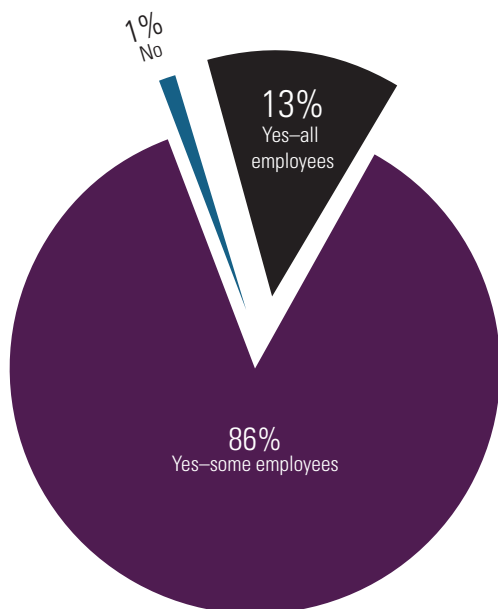
Formal policies around virtual work and telecommuting have yet to be adopted by many in the workforce. Nearly one-half (49 percent) of employees stated that their organization has a formal virtual work/telecommute policy; 40 percent do not and 11 percent don't know if one is offered.

Specialized Training Is Rarely Offered

Most respondents in this Study do not work in organizations that offer training for virtual leaders (see Figure 2). Companies are still figuring out how to train for virtual leadership, as well as how to do define it. At first it was referred to as *e-leadership*, now some call it *virtual leadership,* and others say *leaders of dispersed teams*. The majority of organizations that do offer training report that it is effective (86 percent); however, how efficacy is measured is not defined.

FIGURE 2:

TRAINING OFFERED SPECIFICALLY FOR VIRTUAL LEADERS

Does your organization currently offer any training specifically for virtual leaders?
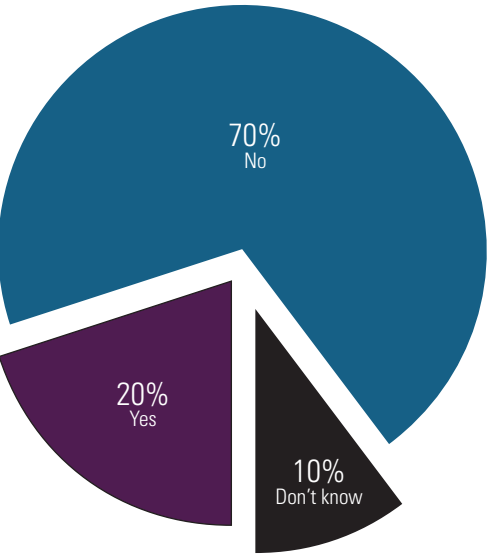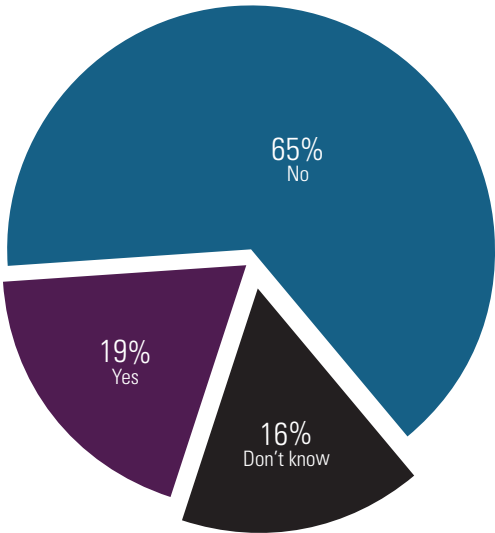
70%
No

20%
Yes

10%
Don't know

FIGURE 3:

TRAINING FOR LEADERS WITH STAFF IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Does your organization offer additional training for leaders with staff in other countries?

65%
No

19%
Yes

16%
Don't know

Taking Virtual Leadership Global

Leading staff in other countries can be similar to leading a dispersed staff; but may require a greater need to be more open minded, culturally sensitive and competent, and flexible with greater time zone variance. Global leaders are also virtual leaders, but not all virtual leaders are global leaders, so additional training could be beneficial. Donna Dennis reports that leaders with staff in other countries are not getting the training they need; and in some cases, organizations cannot always train them based off the traditional leadership skills. About 19 percent of Study respondents indicated that their organizations offer training for leaders with staff in other countries (see Figure 3), which is nearly identical to the amount of organizations that offer virtual leadership training (20 percent). This is not surprising, considering the overlap and similarities in the skills needed.

CONCLUSION

> Ensuring that virtual leaders and leaders of global teams are equipped to lead their staff effectively is vital to their success and productivity. Being a virtual leader is not the same as leading staff face-to-face.

The following trends have emerged in regards to virtual leadership and leaders with staff in other countries:

» Respondents nearly unanimously indicated that they have some opportunity to work virtually; only one-half of these organizations have a formal telecommute policy. More than one-half of these virtual employees receive in-person onboarding.

» Despite the increasing need to have effective and properly trained virtual leaders and leaders of teams with staff in other countries, a minimal number of companies offer or budget for this.

» Acknowledging the need for training virtual leaders was reported to be the greatest challenge in training these leaders; conflicting cultural messages was reported to be the greatest challenge in training leaders with staff in other countries.

» There was a strong statistically significant relationship between putting forth extra effort for employee engagement and the effectiveness of technologies used for communicating in a virtual environment and keeping the staff engaged, especially with web conferencing and instant messaging.

» Being a virtual leader is about connecting people while still maintaining engagement, trust, and rapport, along with acknowledging a team member's human element.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

The American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) is the world's largest professional association dedicated to the training and development field. In more than 100 countries, ASTD's members work in organizations of all sizes, in the private and public sectors, as independent consultants, and as suppliers. Members connect locally in 120 U.S. chapters and with 16 international partners. ASTD started in 1943 and in recent years has widened the profession's focus to align learning and performance to organizational results, and is a sought-after voice on critical public policy issues. For more information, visit www.astd.org.

Laurie Miller is the director of ASTD research services. In that capacity, she serves as ASTD's senior research program strategist and designer. She provides oversight and direction for all of ASTD's internal and external, industry specific, and market research services. Contact information: 703.838.5846 or lmiller@astd.org.

Christina Mandzuk is the research analyst for ASTD research services and served as the author for this report. Contact information: 703.683.8185 or cmandzuk@astd.org.

David Frankel is the research specialist for ASTD and served as an editor for this report. Contact information: 703.683.9593 or dfrankel@astd.org.

Ashley McDonald is the manager of ASTD Press and served as an editor for this report. She edits and manages the production process for all ASTD research reports. Contact information: 703.683.9202 or amcdonald@astd.org.

Lon Levy is a senior designer for ASTD and served as the designer for this report. She conceptualized the ASTD research report design, and has previously worked on conference materials, program guides, brochures, and membership mailings. Contact information: 703.683.9204 or llevy@astd.org.

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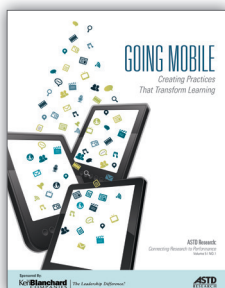
Going Mobile: Creating Practices that Transform Learning

This report is the third collaborative examination of the state of mobile learning undertaken by ASTD and i4cp. It examines how organizations are implementing mobile learning and developing their mobile strategy in the current technology-based landscape.

Leadership Development for Millennials: Why It Matters

The latest collaboration by ASTD and i4cp, *Leadership Development for Millennials*, seeks to examine how organizations are preparing the Millennial generation to manage and lead effectively now and into the future. In analyzing the survey data that informed this study, responses to select questions were filtered by generation to get some insight into perspectives among the generational groups on Millennials, as well as how the generation sees itself.
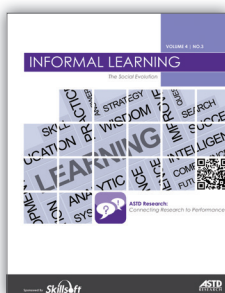
Informal Learning: The Social Evolution

The purpose of *Informal Learning: The Social Evolution*, conducted by ASTD and i4cp, is to examine the ways in which informal learning is evolving and how organizations are leveraging it to improve performance.

The State of the Industry

The State of the Industry is ASTD's definitive review of workplace learning and development trends. In the 2012 *State of the Industry*, sponsored by Skillsoft and Eagle's Flight, 461 organizations representing a diverse sample of industries, sizes, and locations report on their commitment to learning and development.
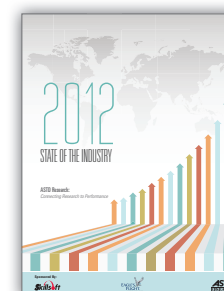
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» We conduct both quantitative and qualitative analysis about workplace learning, talent management and development, and all issues pertaining to training and performance.

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