

How Agile is Your Leadership?

Without having proper supports for team leaders, your distributed work environment may suffer a costly failure.

There is no place for a bad boss in today's workplace. Due to an increasingly global, technology-driven economy, many teams are working outside the traditional office, sometimes in different continents and time zones. The benefits of this type of "distributed" workplace are huge, including increased engagement, decreased real estate costs and better retention of employees. However, if an organization isn't properly supporting its managers through the transition to this new style of working, the consequences could be disastrous.

"If you put a bad leader in front of a distributed work team, their lack of leadership skills becomes evident much faster," says Sherri Wright-Schwietz, Head of Talent & Mastery, ATB Financial Investor Services. And according to a recent survey of 1,374 employees in the UK by B2B marketplace Approved Index, nearly half (42%) had left a job because of a bad boss.

Dr. Laura Hambley, Industrial-Organizational Psychologist and Founder of Work EvOHLution, a Calgary-based distributed work assessment company, adds that if you don't support a worker through the transition to a distributed workplace and you lose them, it can cost \$30,000 to \$50,000 dollars to replace them.

According to Philip Vanhoutte, Plantronics Senior VP and Managing Director, Europe & Africa, distributed leaders "need to be deliberate on many things they may normally do subconsciously in a more traditional environment. Ineffective communication," he warns, "can engender feelings of isolation or lack of value."

Plantronics is one of the many organizations with distributed work teams that took part in piloting Work EvOHLution's **Distributed Leader Profiler**, the first psychometric assessment tool of its kind in the world. The Profiler assesses a distributed leader's strengths and provides personalized feedback for those looking to build their distributed team leadership capabilities.

While there are many assessment tools for leaders on the market, none were developed specifically for leading a mobile workforce. Work EvOHLution's founders have spent 12 years conducting research to determine the capabilities of distributed leaders. To create the most comprehensive model for an effective distributed leader, Work EvOHLution's research team undertook many months of comprehensive interviews with 34 leaders of top distributed teams in Canada, the US and Europe, explains Tom O'Neill, Ph.D., assistant professor of Industrial-Organizational Psychology at the University of Calgary and a research partner with Work EvOHLution.

In addition, Work EvOHLution surveyed approximately 200 distributed leaders and 140 individuals on their teams. What the research shows, says O'Neill, is "if you have the right supports in place, the distributed workplace model becomes a competitive advantage."

An internal survey at ATB Financial Investor Services found that its people would choose a distributed work environment over more money. "I've had team members who have been offered substantially higher competitive offers," says Wright-Schwietz. "But the offers didn't have any flexibility. They were strictly 8 to 5, five days a week in a downtown office building. Once you work this way for a while, you never want to go back."

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