THE 2 MAJOR CHALLENGES MANAGERS FACE IN A REMOTE WORLD

& 3 WAYS TO OVERCOME THEM

Ecsell®
INSTITUTE

THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC TWO YEARS AGO MADE A LOT OF THINGS HARDER.
It became a risk to spend time with loved ones, the line between our work and home lives blurred and eventually faded – even finding a decent used car became near impossible. So it should come as no surprise that managing our team members got a whole lot harder, too.

Using data from nearly 2,500 people surveyed, Ecsell Institute sought to understand how the pandemic changed management over the past two years. Like many other professions, it's clear that managers have struggled, and we uncovered some specific reasons why.

The data in this analysis used March 2020 as the start of the pandemic. 45% of the data was collected in the 15 months prior to the start of the pandemic (pre-COVID), and 55% was collected in the 15 months after the pandemic began (post-COVID). Survey items were consistent across both time periods.

Unsurprisingly, one obvious shift in the data was where people were doing their work. Prior to the pandemic, most respondents worked in a more traditional office environment. In the post-COVID data, only about a third of team members were still in or had gone back to the office.

POST-COVID WORK ENVIRONMENT

37%	32%	31%
REMOTE	OFFICE	HYBRID
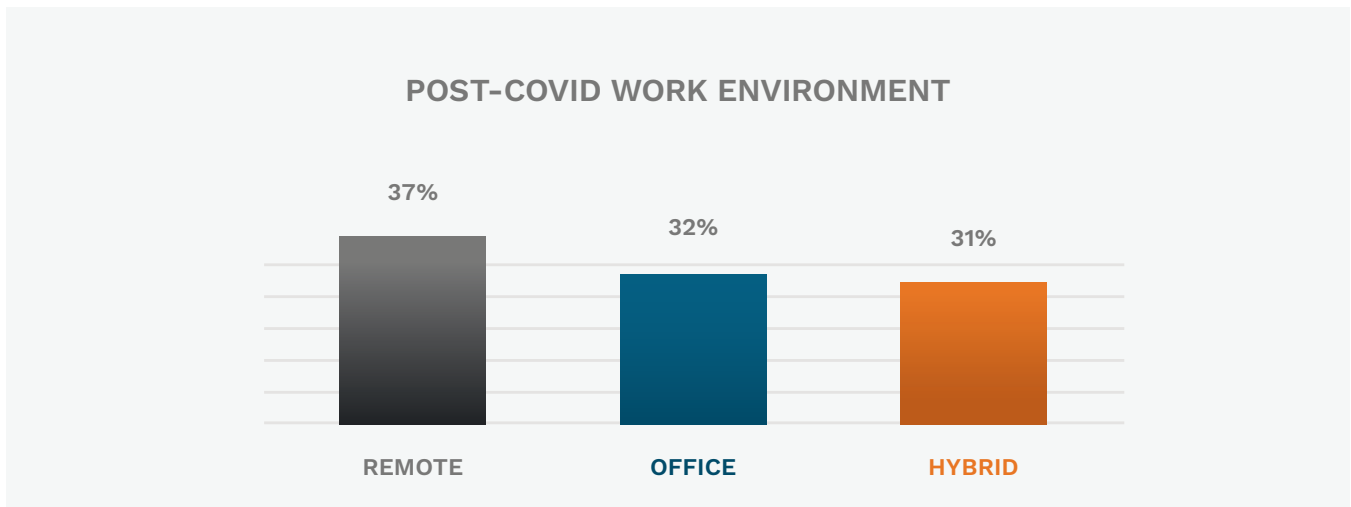
While this data itself isn't a shock, it serves as a gateway to understand how this shift to remote work has impacted the relationship between managers and their team members. It is vital to understand this impact because our research continually shows that when the manager-to-team-member relationship suffers, both employee performance and retention decrease.

In both the pre- and post-COVID data, team members rated their leader's overall skills as a manager on a 1 (low) to 10 (high) scale. The perceived overall manager ability dropped from a mean of 8.51 prior to the pandemic to 8.13 after the pandemic began. While the difference doesn't seem like a huge number, it is what is known as *statistically significant*, which means that team members feel their manager's leadership skills dropped in meaningful ways.

OVERALL MANAGER RATING

PRE-COVID   POST-COVID

IN A POST-COVID WORLD, TEAM MEMBERS FELT THEIR MANAGER'S LEADERSHIP SKILLS DROPPED IN MEANINGFUL WAYS.
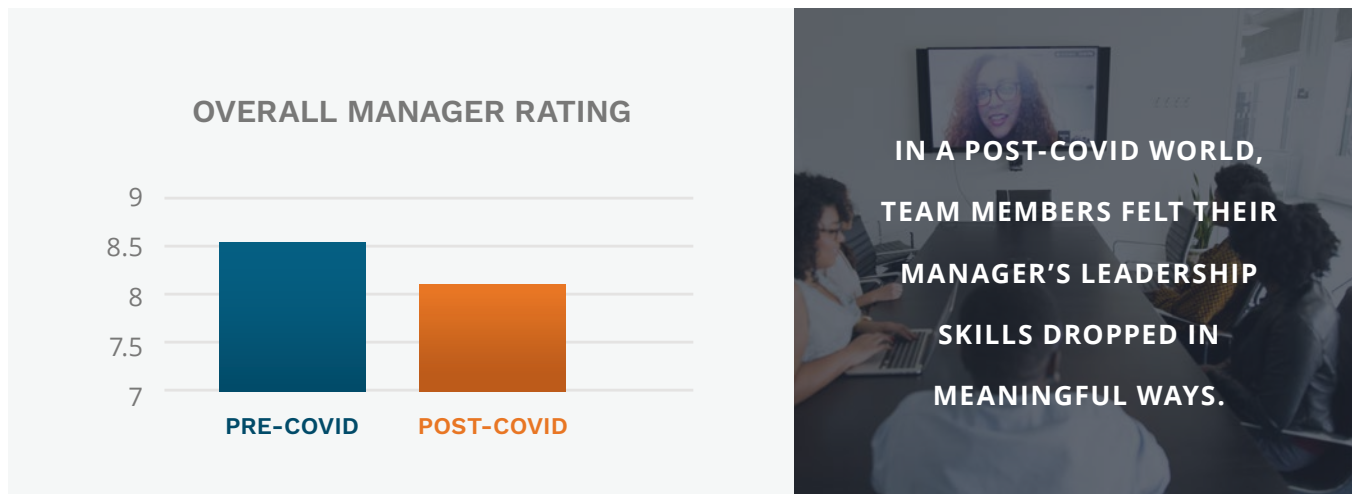
What makes this drop more interesting was our dive into the specific areas that may be driving it. To determine this, we looked at the survey questions where the manager ratings stayed about the same before and after the start of the pandemic, as well as the questions where team members rated their managers significantly different from pre-COVID to post-COVID.

These are the key areas where managers' activities and behaviors had *no* statistically significant change in the pre- to post-COVID time periods.

- **Overall rating of one-to-one meeting effectiveness.**
- **Overall rating of team meeting effectiveness.**
- **Keeping to a consistent meeting scheduling.**
- **Providing a clear picture of what team members need to do.**
- **Giving team members the opportunity to direct their own work.**

Combined, these outcomes show that the typical blocking-and-tackling tasks associated with management remained generally constant following the pandemic's inception. Managers still met with their team members regularly and made those meetings effective. They gave clear direction on what team members needed to do. And they continued to give team members the freedom they needed to do their work.

While the basic management activities stayed the same, there were statistically significant differences in other key manager behaviors. The largest differences were in these areas.

- **Making team members feel like they are an important part of the team (14 point drop).**
- **Doing an excellent job of recognizing and rewarding team achievements (7 point drop).**
- **Holding other team members accountable to their job performance (9 point drop).**
- **Showing they are working as hard as their team members are working (8 point drop).**

These management behaviors with the biggest declines indicate **two major challenges of managing in the post-COVID world.**

1. Managers are having a harder time showing their team members that everyone on the team, including themselves, is working hard and doing what they're supposed to be doing.

2. Managers are struggling to provide enough appreciation and recognition to ensure their team members feel valued and fairly rewarded for their work.

So, after two years of COVID-19, how can managers help team members feel confident that everyone is pulling their own weight when they can't see everyone working alongside them? And how can they ensure that team members feel valued and recognized for their contributions when they aren't interacting with them outside of structured meetings? Here are three ideas to try:

1

BE MORE OPEN ABOUT INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE METRICS.
This doesn't mean publicly sharing performance reviews, but it does mean reviewing objective performance numbers that team members should be hitting during team meetings. This could include looking at things like percent to sales goal, client retention numbers, marketing leads brought in, errors reported, or any other measurable results. By doing this, managers can ensure all team members understand the team's progress to goal and how each person is contributing to it. But even more importantly, they can also create a more collaborative team environment. Because, when team members know what their peers are trying to accomplish, they can provide better ideas and support to help them.

2

PROVIDE MORE INDIVIDUALIZED RECOGNITION.

Recognition is simply more meaningful when it is more personal. To ensure that team members feel adequately recognized and rewarded for their successes, we encourage managers to make it unique to the person. This can look like getting a gift card to their favorite restaurant or store, rather than a generic place. Or it could mean giving a detailed description of what the person did to earn the recognition, rather than just telling them they did a good job. The more the recognition is uniquely about the person, the more valued the employee feels.

3

BE EXPLICIT ABOUT EACH TEAM MEMBER'S CONTRIBUTIONS.

As stated above, the biggest drop in manager rating from pre- to post-COVID is whether or not a team member feels like a valued member of the organization. It's critical that managers never make their team members guess how their manager feels about their contributions. Instead, they should be explicit about it. At each of their one-to-one meetings, we encourage managers to share how they believe the team member added value to the team that week. By making this a regular habit, managers will ensure their team members always feel like they matter and that their work is important to the organization's success.

To learn more about managing in the post-COVID world, and how to become a better coach to your team members all the time, set a meeting to chat more about the Ecsell Institute Coaching Effect Survey and Coaching Effect Academy. **We're here to help »**

Ecsell
INSTITUTE