

A Probing German Case Study on Trust Building Factors Around Online Leadership in Virtual Work Environments

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Abstract: With the rise of digitalization companies seek to enhance their efficiency by adopting virtual communication platforms. Although technological advancement helped companies to implement remote working and encourage flexibility, it comes with its own challenges such as virtual team building, engagement and one of the most important one, building trust. It therefore is pivotal to explore how trust building factors between the employee and the leader during online leadership in a virtual environment might affect a company's performance.

In a probing study, nine semi-structured interviews with participants from different age groups and differently sized companies, pragmatically chosen from both management and employees, were conducted. All had experience of working remotely. Thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke [1] is applied to analysing the data. The results are presented in a tentative framework of trust building factors and their importance for online leaders, showing amongst others the importance of proactivity, communication and – somewhat overlapping – social and emotional skills in managers. As managing this means additional effort, the allocation of sufficient time is an overarching topic. The results will allow researchers, including the authors, to be more focused in future in-depth studies on trust building in e-leadership.

Keywords: *Trust, Trust Building, Online Leadership, E-leaders, Virtual Work, Covid-19*

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1. Introduction

The development of technology and today's digitalization has introduced working together in virtual teams, making remote work part of the workplace. Technology enables virtual collaboration independent of location [2]. Business is being done increasingly globally and companies work together internally and externally across different locations and time zones, with the importance of proximity decreasing [3, 4]. The Covid-19 crisis has given this trend additional impetus: many businesses were forced to shift to working remotely and many of these changes will stay

beyond the end of the crisis [5, 6].

This also means changes in leadership: with the increase of remote work, management increasingly communicates with employees via phone calls, video calls and emails [7]. This is meant to add to efficiency and is generally regarded as advantageous by all parties including employees [8] but also creates challenges around team building or managing the border between private and work like [7, 9]. Traditional leadership patterns cannot be applied in the virtual environment: missing face to face interaction, hitherto considered crucial for building trust [10], makes managing more challenging in a virtual environment [11, 12]. Trust might thus be even more important in virtual environments

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[13, 14] – the “e-leader” requires a new set of skills.

However, it remains unclear which skills, behaviors and factors exactly contribute to building trust online and existing research remains contradictory and inconclusive. Looking at the perspectives of both leaders and employees, this research aims at clarifying trust building factors in a virtual environment. Building on data collected for an earlier study [15], it will qualitatively analyse semi-structured interviews, abductively looking for causal relationships of a number of factors with trust.

2. Literature Review

As mentioned, trust in the leaders is a highly important factor for reaching success [16], even more so in virtual teams [14, 17]. Companies with high levels of trust between employees and their management report 50 % higher productivity, 76 % more engagement, 74% less stress, 40% less burn-outs and 29% more life satisfaction [18]. However, in a virtual environment, trust “takes on a new dimension” [11, p. 13]. Traditionally, building trust is known to be built via face-to-face contact and frequent interaction, factors missing in remote work – even more so under the contact restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic [19].

2.1 Building Trust

In a much cited definition of trust, Mayer, Davis [20, p. 712] call it “the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another party ... irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party”. Thus, trust has to do with willingly and consciously accepting dependence, expecting the trusted party to act at least not against the interest of the trusting party. Consequently, being trusted to be able to lead is crucial, and the ability of building trust is seen as a key skill in leadership [21] and the key to gaining necessary information and co-operation from employees [22]. Especially through increasingly distributed and collaborative work styles, relationships in which the employee only follows the job description are not stable anymore [4].

On the other hand, trustful relationships have a positive impact on the overall performance of the team [23]. Trust gives access to the knowledge and creative thinking of its employees, and encourages autonomous working and risk taking, as employees feel safe [4]. This can lead to significantly improved performance [18, 24]. In contrast, broken trust can have serious negative performance effects and unwanted staff turnover [4].

One approach to determining why some people are trusted, is to consider the attributes of that person. In a seminal contribution, Mayer, Davis [20] developed a model based on the three characteristics of integrity, benevolence, and ability (or competence), confirmed in later works [25] and still at the basis of many studies on trust building [26].

Integrity as a major factor is confirmed by Malhotra, Majchrzak [27], finding that actions are more important for trust building than goodwill. In leadership practice, these key characteristics can be found in open communication, fairness, and having good intentions [21]. Other important factors are consistency in deeds and values as well as honesty [4]. Trust can be cognitive or affective, but there is also mention of trust propensity, i.e. a persons’ preparedness to trust others [20], which can be based on personality but also culture or upbringing.

Trust is built over time and generally seen as based on in-depth personal interactions with face to face contact. Frequency and quality of interaction also matter, and non-work-related interactions also can improve trust [17]. As discussed, this is challenged: globalization, technology, different approaches to designing the workplace such as “new work” [28], virtual teams or temporary structures – endangering especially confidence building [29] – all disrupt traditional arrangements [12].

2.2 Online Trust Building Challenges

As the virtual environment makes the traditional process of building trust difficult, managing remotely and via electronic means of communications presented special challenges from the start [30, 31]. Some even challenge the validity of most leadership theories in the current context [32], and new terms like e-leadership were coined to emphasise the difference [33]. This means new challenges for managers, with trust building as a central task [34].

Next to traditional factors for building trust, this might mean additional ones like additional care for employee well-being and work-life balance [9] or making sure all elements of communication be transported to online environments, even humour [35]. Savolainen [21] believes that the e-leader requires the same competences as a traditional leader, including social skills, the necessary know how etc. However, she also emphasizes that traditionally, personal interaction is seen as a basis to fulfill these tasks. Due to for instance missing face to face contact or missing body language signs, the e-leader might have to invest more to be able to build a trusting relationship. Additionally, contact might become shorter, carrying the risk of misunderstandings, to which are added a number of issues pertaining to frequent electronic communication such as “Zoom fatigue” [36]. This requires management to adapt and to develop new or different skills and approaches [17]. As an example, writing skills might for instance become increasingly important when communication moves from meetings to e-mail [4].

Decision making is also based on new or additional sources of information, an important factor in a world changing constantly or in times of crisis [37], and constant electronic exchange might lead to pressure and anxiety [38]. E-leaders are thus challenged, but while recognizing the

issue, many sources refer to the problem of replacing face-to-face communication to build trust but leave the potential solutions sketchy [39].

Some personal characteristics such as honesty and sociability seem to be important, as well as the easiness for employees to contact their leaders and the perceived care for the employees' well-being [21]. Other important factors for building trust online seem to be the frequency, procedures, and norms of interaction, highly personal in interpretation from both sides. Malhotra, Majchrzak [27] see actions more important than goodwill, because this is what will be noticed. Therefore, they recommend leaders to make their actions explicit and visible, making sure they communicate according to the norms of their team lest they be misunderstood. Morrison-Smith and Ruiz [17] add to this the importance of how technology is used: regularity, predictability and being on a par helps. Finally, trust can be built interactively, through technology used for effective communication [40].

Despite the challenges in virtual teams, in some instances a high level of trust could be observed, even when there was only little interaction. This phenomenon, first introduced by Meyerson, Weick [29], is called "swift trust" and can form in temporary work arrangements as "collective perception and relating that is capable of managing issues of vulnerability, uncertainty, risk, and expectations." (p.167). In such cases, virtual teams show high levels of trust already in the beginning, through people transferring their existing expectations from their former environments [41]: the team assumes trust in the beginning, verifying later. Trust perceptions are then changed when necessary [42]. Understanding swift trust can help understanding trust building in changing and virtual work environments, but cannot be taken for granted nor is necessarily durable. Which factors actually contribute to building trust thus has not fully been explored yet.

3. Research Goal and Data Collection

This research aims at identifying trust building factors important in a virtual environment. Teti, Schatz [43] think that qualitative research best fits situations as understanding change and disruption, and the present one looks beyond statistics: it is about experiences, appraisal and resulting feelings. On top of that, many aspects have not yet been thoroughly researched and a qualitative approach is more open to the unexpected. Hence the qualitative research design, looking for different perspectives, both from employees and employers.

The data were collected using semi-structured interviews using a short interview guide with probing questions, with the aim of making interview partners talk freely and relate stories from their working life. To the first seven interviews from the aforementioned study [15], another two were added to further clarify certain aspects. Interview partners 1

to 5 work for a German listed company with strong global presence and around 20.000 employees, interview partners 6 and 7 were employed by a German SME with about 100 employees and operating domestically only. An additional two participants (8 and 9) work for a large international consultancy. In order to add to the diversity of the data collected, people with different roles, hierarchical levels and from both common genders were interviewed, as table 1 shows:

Table 1: Overview of interview partners

Company		Gender	Employees in line
1	Interview partner 1	F	2
1	Interview partner 2	F	0
1	Interview partner 3	M	>100
1	Interview partner 4	F	50
1	Interview partner 5	M	>100
2	Interview partner 6	M	4
2	Interview partner 7	F	0
3	Interview partner 8	F	3
3	Interview partner 9	M	450

This also meant people from different age groups, as generations can react differently to technology-enabled means of collaboration and have different personal goals [6, 44]. The participants with leading position were asked about both their perspective as a manager and their perspective as an employee with superiors to gain a more comprehensive and detailed view on the topic. Eight out of the nine participants worked completely remotely since the beginning of the pandemic, thus for at least two years. All of them still work remotely but started going back to the office again for 1-2 days a week. One participant did an internship for 7 months and then full time for another 8 months, all completely remotely.

The interviews were conducted via MicroSoft Teams and lasted for 30 to 65 minutes. All interviews were conducted in German, the references cited below have been translated by the authors. They were all recorded, to which all participants consented, and later deleted to ensure anonymity. The interviews started with a small introduction into the topic and background information about the participants. It was divided into three parts. In the first, participants were asked about their understanding of trust in the workplace general, in the second part they were probed for what they thought were factors that contribute to building trust in traditional settings so that these could be compared to the answers to part three which dealt with the process of building trust online.

4. Findings and Analysis

The analysis method applied is a thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke [1] to "to systematically transform a large amount of text into a highly organized and

concise summary of key results” [45, p. 94]. The data were screened for details on the aspect of trust building in virtual environments, looking for explicit meanings but also for eventual latent ones lying behind the semantic data content. After a first step of familiarization with the content of the transcripts they were coded, using an open approach with no coding frame or pre-defined codes, corresponding to what Saldaña [46] calls initial coding.

The codes were then entered into a table and sorted by topics or categories. In this context, it is important to note that themes do not emerge: they depend on their conceptualisation and the research focus, and thus are created from the data [47]. Therefore, the themes need to be at the starting point of the actual analysis and findings are drawn from the themes rather than as the themes. The following themes were defined:

- Trust definition is personal (discussed in 4.1)
- Trust needs to go both ways (4.1)
- Online trust building is different, but works (4.2)
- Some trust building factors pertain to any situation, some to specifically online or traditional settings (4.3)
- Trust building factors have different impact (4.3)

4.1 Meaning of trust

When asked what they understand by trust, only four respondents defined trust and what it means for them, while all other participants tried to illustrate the concept through specific examples from their working life – admittedly, however, good sources of information on trust building factors as discussed below. Interview partner (henceforth referred to as “IP”) 1 stated:

“for me trust between the employee and manager can be seen as the glue and as the link of the relationship ... without trust it can be very hard to be productive and efficient because there is the risk that the leader loses the employee and with that his main resource.”

Most participants feel similarly, but trust is not uniformly given or earned. According to IP 3,

“trust is a feeling in a working relationship, which arises through various factors and these factors of trust need to develop over a certain time”

and while he also said that

“trust is the success factor in terms of leadership because it regulates the basic requirement for collaboration and ... is one of the essential foundations of a successful working relationship and company.”

it is clear that despite the fact that all players wish for trust, it requires trust building factors which might be different according to the situation and the people involved as well as an ill-defined amount of time to develop. It is also not uniform what a trustful relationship actually means. Several respondents mentioned that for them a trusting relationship means being able to rely on the other person, to

communicate openly, giving space to each other, being able to talk about confidential topics, to actively listen and support each other, being honest with each other and being able to give and receive feedback.

Furthermore, for a trusting relationship it is important to be assessable and predictable and stick to promises made. Participants saw this as extremely important since it gives planning security and makes the employee feel safe. However, what this means is seen in different ways. While for IP 6 (a leader of a small team) trust means

“that team members do their job reliably, I do not expect constant feedback ... what counts is the final result”,

IP 8, a consulting manager, finds it important to have people that she

“can trust to know when to involve me, and to involve me when they have the impression that they don’t know whether to do so – procedures need to be followed in order for the results to be of the highest quality, and I do have a role in ensuring this.”

The statements of what trust is and how it can be detected in ones’ colleagues differ widely. A common point is that trust is manifest as a “positive feeling” and not so much dependent on the amount of control exercised – too little can also be seen as a managerial weakness, thus showing a lack of skills needed to build trust in a superior according to e.g. Schoorman, Mayer [25]. Thus, the results on one hand confirm that both managers and their employees see trust as a central leadership skill and a necessity [as discussed in e.g. 21], and that trust needs to go both ways to have a positive impact. On the other hand, the results also suggest that how trust can be built – and how strong it is – depends on many factors, is situational and personal and sometimes simply dependent on “a reasonable level of sympathy” (IP 7).

4.2 Online trust building

On the upside, all participants think that trust can be built online: it is more difficult, but possible. Seeing each other in person adds depth to a relationship and that people can better be appraised when met physically. Still, participants’ experiences were positive on the whole, and most were convinced that trust built online need not be any less than traditionally built one:

“COVID showed that [communicating via electronic means] works and after a while, relationships and trust were, for me, just the same as before. It worked well ... and in many instances seamlessly.” (IP 5)

Only two respondents were skeptical whether the same trust could be reached, but expected at least a satisfactory level, permitting effective working together. However, for building trust online, much more time and effort needs to be invested. IP 4 expects more “care” from managers, and for IP 6 it is especially difficult to

“...compensate for the lack of most nonverbal communication elements. One needs to be more

concentrated and prepared, also because verbal communication has to be more precise and comprehensive when communicating electronically.”

These are known issues, see Bailenson [36], and while electronic communication might be more efficient in some instances, e.g. through less need for travel, if it comes to building trustful relationships, participants find it much more time consuming. It also depends on former relationships: it is more difficult being trusted by people one has never physically met, while maintain existing levels of trust with known coworkers is easier:

“for the ultimate level of trust you need to have seen each other in person, experienced some things together”. (IP 3)

The widely discussed challenge of missing face to face contact and reduced interaction [12, 21] is thus confirmed, and meeting by happenstance over a coffee or in the hallways is sorely missed. The results, however, do also show that managers and employees both are aware of the challenges of the virtual environment and consciously address them:

“We talked a lot about what would change in communication, internally but also with the client, and we tried to find solutions for the missing things, e.g. electronic informal events and suchlike.” (IP 9)

One key element is to identify the main trust building factors and assess whether they will be present and effective in virtual environments as well. The following section addresses this.

4.3 Relevant factors for building trust online

Participants have named a number of factors they believe play an important role in trust building in virtual environments. Figure 1 shows them by frequency of occurrence. While in thematic analysis, the importance of an idea is more relevant than the number of occurrences [48] and the sample size is too small for any valid statistical analysis, this overview can give an indication which type of factors are experienced as having effect, at least in the respondents’ working environment.

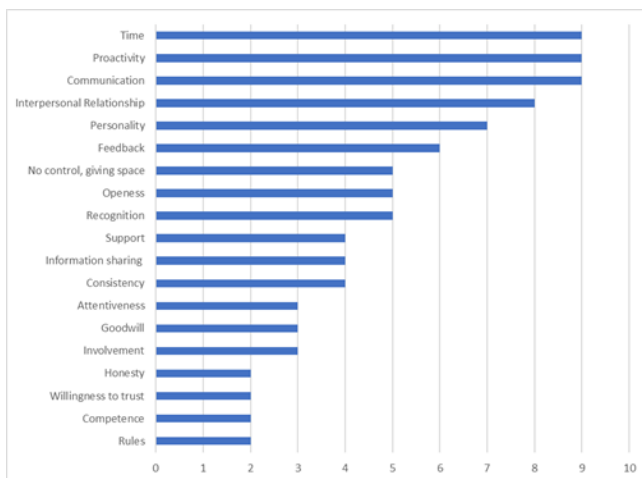


Figure 1: Factors of trust building named by participants by frequency of occurrence

The main aim of this research is to be able to compare this with what according are the main factors in traditional environments. The following pages will discuss the factors shown in figure one, starting at the bottom and working up to the ones that were more important to the respondents, looking at relationships between the factors and showing along the presentation of the findings that allocating the necessary (additional) time is actually more an overarching topic rather than a single trust building factor.

While the factors defined by Mayer, Davis [20] also feature amongst this list, it is also visible that others seem to have a higher importance in the virtual environment. Ability, or competence, is however mentioned, e.g. by IP 3:

“It is important to know that you do not only have trust in the person, but also knowing that you can trust in his work results ... and as an employee I would expect from my leader that he has the competence for being able to help me and has made good decisions in the past.”

Integrity or honesty, a critical characteristic for determining trustworthiness [4], was addressed – and by some identified with consistency and the keeping of promises. Benevolence, the third factor according to Schoorman, Mayer [25], was not named explicitly but can be assumed to be present in other concepts such as personality, recognition or willingness to trust, also found by Robbins and Judge [4]. However, this needs time, because:

“Actions need to follow [and be seen] ...when you agree on something and then it is not worked on that consistently, then trust can also fall apart again.” (IP 4)

This is in line with Malhotra, Majchrzak [27] who argue that goodwill is hard to notice online and therefore it is even more important that actions follow, but the behavior of the other party needs to be observed over a certain period of time. IP 1 stressed that this is especially true for new managers who quickly need to be seen “giving a direction and setting people on the right track” effectively to earn trust. What also takes time are the additional communication requirements as compared to traditional environments, especially around the more difficult task to manage employees’ well-being. Feelings are less easily transmitted electronically and using these might also create stress – leaders need to apply extra care [49]. This need can be felt in some responses such as

“I need to be informed, and I don’t know what’s going on in the office because there is none. I need to involve my team, and I want to be involved by our [consulting] partners – plus I need help when stressed and need to know when my project team is stressed. I don’t see them, they don’t see me. That stresses us all (laughs).” (IP 8)

Maintaining an overview can be challenging [21], but on the other hand, it is possible through the factors mentioned, such as proactivity, regular communication, giving feedback, recognition of achievements and support. Thus, building trust online requires intense interpersonal interaction as found also by Morrison-Smith and Ruiz [17]. This, however, cannot be managed by the leaders alone. "You can't command trust" (IP 3), and while some employees actively search the contact and share feelings, opinions etc., others are more reserved. For some respondents it felt as if

"...some are not really interested in developing a trusting relationship and question everything, no matter how the leader is behaving." (IP 4)

Giving trust can help – one participant mentioned suspiciousness from his leader as a demotivating factor, others felt motivated by the fact that their leaders trusted them. Working remotely has a high potential of misinterpretations and carries the risk of starting to excessively check on the employee, which harms trust building [11]. Giving freedom is thus important, and openness in communication, also of problems related to online work, helps:

"it is a different situation, and ... when the leader opens up it can be seen as a huge boost for developing trust." (IP4)

Since interactions do not happen automatically, contact needs to be established by both sides. This means that out of own initiative, both parties actively need to seek contact and decide to invest time.

"... many informal things, ... do not happen anymore and therefore they need to be replaced by formal ones by the leader [and] proactivity is a big element of trust in the virtual environment, since the leader needs to invest much more to make sure that everyone is up to date and one has an overview where people stand." (IP 3)

This should include knowing about the employee's wellbeing and daily life, and according to several participants, when working virtually, the inhibition threshold for an employee is much higher than in personal contact which makes proactivity by the leader even more important. This is part of the additional attentiveness which is called for in remote working [49], and requires that more time is invested than in traditional environments. This devoting of time is mentioned as an important factor by both managers and employees: online, both parties need to invest more than in traditional settings.

While also important in any other setting, recognition and feedback were seen as an important topic in the proactive communication by managers in the virtual environment and more challenging because

"...they often come too short since online meetings are scheduled close to each other and it can happen that the leader is mainly focused on the results due to time pressure..." (IP 1)

However, when working remotely, it can be difficult for the leader to maintain an overview on who has worked on what for how long, so to be able to appreciate results, managers need to "not only be available but to exert control without being seen to do so because of lack of trust" (IP 9), a difficult balancing act. This is also a communication issue, especially in a virtual environment. While electronic communication can offer some advantages, e.g. less need to travel [12] or, as IP 2 mentioned, the opportunity to discuss confidential topics without being overheard, both literature and participants agree that electronic communication presents substantial challenges such as lost content or the risk of misinterpretation [e.g. 36, 38]. Things need to be communicated effectively, ensuring that everyone receives all information needed. Participants see a risk of quickly being excluded from relevant processes online, and while this can be addressed by the proactivity and attentiveness discussed above, the virtual environment requires to more actively think about who needs to be informed and to prepare any meetings well:

"I believe it took me at least twice the time to prepare for any meeting, especially how to convey the content, because people in e-meetings won't ask questions and I cannot see from their faces whether they've got it or not." (IP 8)

It can help to agree on norms and rules on how information is communicated virtually [27], an aspect also mentioned by IP 1, especially with regard to working in different time zones, adding that, regardless

"...observation is needed, I need to use my senses much more than normally, I only have the small video image, and some employees don't even turn on the camera. Then I only have what was said, and this requires interpretation and being much more sensitive and observant."

It is visible that all respondents miss face-to-face contact and look for the right balance, also to improve relationship management. All participants believe that one needs to be familiar with a person one is working with to develop a deep trustful relationship, especially as only then, any behaviour can be interpreted in the right way. This confirms Savolainen [21] and is more difficult online, increasing with the number of participants in electronic communication. Most informal communication, important also for building trust [50], is missing or difficult to organize:

"we tried a number of things, informal e-meetings, electronic gin tasting, online games in our teams, but it's not the same, the chat in the corner will always be missing and most employees got tired of it after a while." (IP 9)

Communication in the virtual environment is often seen as much more formal than personal one, as found by Morrison-Smith and Ruiz [17], also due to the fact that according to most respondents, meetings are scheduled more closely to each other and that there is no time for small talk in the beginning and in the end of the meeting.

"People tend to go straight to the topic and after discussion, people tend to leave the call, no one is really

staying for some private chat.” (IP 7)

The time right before and after the meeting was usually the time where the most honest opinions were shared, concerns were expressed, and informal conversation happened. This also contributed to a better ambiance, and to trust. What participants could not say yet was which mix of personal and electronic communication they believe to be ideal, but they were very conscious of the challenges of building trust in a virtual setting, including the overarching topic of allocating sufficient time.

5. Discussion and Contribution

The aim of this research was to identify the factors that are relevant for building trust between the employee and the leader during online leadership, and the data yielded insight into which ones were experiences as necessary and effective. The factors as presented in figure 1 and discussed above further detail the findings in Mayer, Davis [20] and Schoorman, Mayer [25].

It seems that traditional factors are still relevant for building trust online. However, the major challenges of the virtual environment like missing face to face contact, less interaction etc. make the traditional way of building trust more difficult online and some factors seem to be more helpful for building trust in the virtual environment than others. As discussed in the literature review, none of these factors are new, but the ones discussed below are not all the ones which can be found in works on trust building but those which stem from the data of this study. Some were referred to explicitly by the respondents (see figure 1), others, such as integrity or the importance of social skills emerged in the analysis.

As found earlier [21], personal characteristics are important. Some seem especially helpful, like integrity, as expected by Malhotra, Majchrzak [27], but the participants in this study accorded more importance to goodwill than hitherto credited. On the other hand, openness and the willingness to establish a relationship at personal level lose importance in a virtual setting, which might be due to the fact that all people involved understand that there is no alternative when most communication happens electronically, as deplorable as that may be. Predictability, however, is confirmed as an important trait [see 17].

Interaction still needs to happen and both managers and employees with no managing responsibility accorded a high level of importance to proactivity, as it mitigates some of the challenges of the online trust building, e.g. by addressing the major problem of missing ad-hoc interaction. Thus, there is a feeling that even in electronic communication, some elements of traditional exchange can be transported, provided it is done the right way: with integrity, empathy, proactively and, as the participants add, containing feedback and recognition and communicated effectively. This confirms the importance of frequency but

also quality of communication [17, 40] as well as of care for the employees [9].

The latter is also needed when addressing the shortcomings and dangers of electronic communication, e.g. the risk of related anxiety and misunderstandings as described in Waizenegger, McKenna [38]. Accordingly, leaders will have to invest additional time and effort, and emotional and social skills such as actively listening, recognizing where support is needed and providing the help needed gain importance. While it remains unclear whether one can go as far as to say that virtual environments overall challenge leadership theories [32], this kind of leadership situation shows marked differences with traditional management. It merits different approaches and a particular labelling, for which “e-leadership” is well established.

Table 2 will summarize the key findings in a framework of influencing factors. This framework can be helpful as a recommendation for managers which factors to focus on when aiming to build trust in a virtual environment. They are grouped by personal characteristics, recommended actions and managerial skills, and the ones which are especially important or effective according to the participants in this study are printed in bold.

Table 2: Relevant factors identified in this study for trust building between employee and leader during online leadership

Personal characteristics	
Benevolence, goodwill	Goodwill, show interest in development/work/wellbeing, deploy employee as effectively as possible but take personal situation into account
Openness	Be transparent, share feelings, thoughts, get to know each other on a personal level
Integrity and consistency	Consistency, be predictable, honest
Actions	
Proactivity	Out of own initiative, invest time and effort to actively search and keep contact with employees since frequency and length of interaction matter, try to maintain an overview of the employee’s daily work and wellbeing, keep employee in processes
Communication	Make sure all employees are kept informed and involved in communication, that all relevant information is shared adequately, communicate clearly and factually, agree on rules so that everyone has a similar understanding of communication
Attentiveness	Be more sensitive, keep an ear on employee, observe, maintain overview, be visible

Recognition & Feedback	Have an overview on the daily work of the employee, make sure recognition and giving feedback do not come too short, consciously invest time here too
No tight control	Maintaining an overview over the employee's work is important, but no tight control, give space
Skills	
Competence (ability)	Competence, know how
Emotional skills	Understanding, empathy
Social skills	Actively listen, communicate accordingly, provide support

In addition to that, (prior) personal relationships make managing in virtual environments easier [see also 12] and the need for putting additional time and effort is valid as a general rule. The necessity of allocating sufficient time is thus not a distinct trust building factor but an overarching necessity, and it follows from the findings that for the purpose of gaining trust, more time, maybe even considerably more time, will be needed than in traditional settings.

Thus, e-leaders face new challenges and managers will have to adapt to new, virtual work environments, especially as the trend towards more e-communication looks set to increase its pace [17]. Processes will have to be adapted accordingly, and organisations need to understand the needs of virtual leaders to be able to set up the supporting environment needed [34]. An indication such as the above framework on what will help building the trust needed for effective management should prove helpful.

6. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The sample, while consisting of participants who are exposed to e-leading and being led in a virtual environment, might not be representative for the population. However, this was accepted as this study aimed at identifying trust building factors in virtual environments so as to be able to conduct further investigations in a more focused way. Research with larger sample sizes can provide additional insight on potential factors affecting employee-manager trust, and longitudinal studies can give more measurable results. It may allow a researcher to investigate the difference between the expectations of the people involved and what organisations do or can do to address any issues.

The effects of the trust-building factors on feeling safe, as expected by Robbins and Judge [4] or on performance [e.g. 18, 23] were also not touched on so far and can be a topic for additional studies. However, the results of this study will allow researchers, including the authors, to be more focused in future studies deepening the exploration of trust

building in e-leadership. In general, research around the trust building factors in flexible and remote working arrangements can help shape the workplace in an attractive way for both managers and employees. This can give companies an advantage in the competition for the best candidates for jobs.

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