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In partnership with  GitLab

The Making of a Modern Leader in Europe:

Do skills differ from country to country?

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**Different countries—
different Leaders?**

Different countries—different leaders?

The pressure building over leadership skills development, coupled with the challenges in reporting soft skills impact, and the difficulty finding targeted and easy-to-execute leadership programs, means L&D leaders have to figure out how to scale leadership training quickly at a reasonable cost.

The skills of modern leadership, such as strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, resilience, and agility, have changed significantly since the pandemic due to the changes brought about by remote work and digital transformation, employee burnout, and economic uncertainty.

This situation opens up several questions: what influence is leadership having on talent attraction and retention? How do we make sure our teams have what they need to survive in uncertain times?

Moreover, many companies today rely on employees worldwide, leveraging their diversity and local expertise to gain a competitive edge. But when a successful leader changes country, and thus culture, what in their leadership do they have to adapt to, and what should they maintain? Do cultural differences influence the effectiveness of specific leadership styles? Or are there universal qualities?

Through our **Making of a Modern Leader** research involving a survey of 400 people managers in Germany (100 respondents), France (100 respondents), and the United Kingdom (200 respondents), with survey partner [OnePoll](#) and insights from remote leadership champion [GitLab](#), this report unpacks:



What leadership means in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom and how they compare.



The skills needed to connect, inspire and thrive as leaders in these countries.

Research background

A total of 400 managers in the UK, France, and Germany participated in the Making of a Modern Leader research. Nearly half of all respondents worked in either financial services (12.25%), e-commerce (13.5%), industrials (10.75%), or healthcare (10%).

GitLab's [Darren Murph](#) also participated in the analysis portion of this research. Murph is a pioneer of and advocate for the title of “head of remote.” He authored GitLab's “[Remote Playbook](#),” which codifies GitLab's practices for working online. You can learn his takeaways on Coursera in his “[How to Manage a Remote Team](#)” course.



The evolution of leadership over time

The history of leadership

What does good leadership look like? It's a challenge researchers have pondered for decades.

Here are the various leadership models we've seen over time:¹



Anatomy of a modern leader in Europe

One goal of our research was to understand the evolution of leadership in the face of socioeconomic change and technological disruptions and the differences in its development across various European countries: the UK, Germany, and France

To answer this question, we asked people managers in these three countries to select the most sought-after characteristics of a leader today:



United Kingdom

- Confident decision-maker
- Problem solver
- **Effective communicator**



France

- Confident decision-maker
- **Organized and accountable**
- Problem solver



Germany

- Confident decision-maker
- Problem solver
- **Inspirational and trustworthy**

**Leading in a
digital revolution**

The impact of the digital revolution

Given the speed at which companies introduce technological innovations, employees may get bogged down or even fall behind without proper leadership. To unlock your business's competitive edge, you must empower employees to leverage the right technology at the right time and place.

What's more, in a global economy, leaders are up against even stiffer challenges. Creating successful teams is already hard when everyone is local, but when employees come from different countries and backgrounds, the expectations around leadership may differ and add more complexity.²

The result is a new set of expectations, demands, and skills in four critical areas of leadership: leading an organization, leading teams, leading transformation, and leading oneself.

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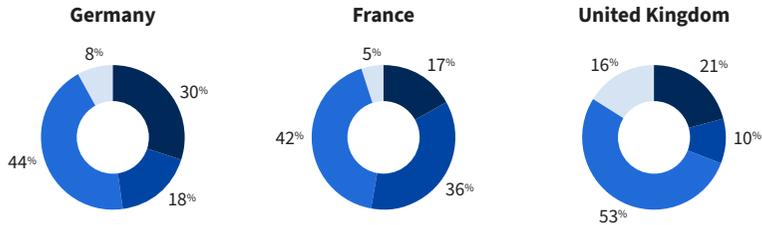
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Darren Murph
Head of Remote, GitLab
 GitLab

1. Leading the organization: Hybrid, remote, and in-person challenges

Hybrid, in-person, or remote—what is the norm in your organization today?

Most countries surveyed operate in a hybrid work environment, with approximately 50% office capacity at all times; however, in Germany, 30% of the people managers surveyed were still predominantly working in person. These differences may consequently mean certain leadership traits like flexibility, trust, or motivation are valued or need to be practiced differently from country to country.



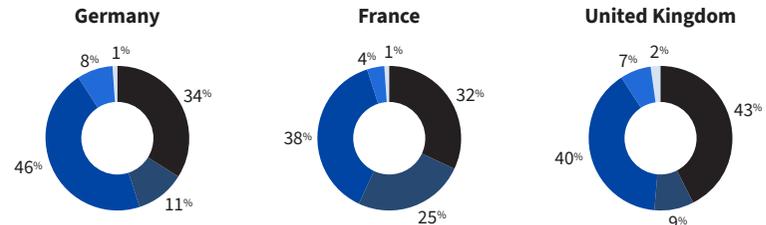
How would you best describe your current work setup?

- In person
- Hybrid (approx 90% office capacity)
- Hybrid (approx 50% office capacity)
- Remote

 Recommended course on **remote leadership**:
[How to Manage a Remote Team](#)

Has leadership changed for better or worse since the pandemic?

All countries surveyed report leadership has changed since the pandemic. People managers in the UK report that it has done so for the better (43%) with its predominantly hybrid workplace model. Perhaps because 77% of employees in the UK state they want a mix of face-to-face and remote working to feel heard.³ France is where respondents feel leadership has worsened the most since the pandemic (25%).



Has leadership changed for better or for worse?

- Better
- Worse
- Some things for better, others for worse
- Stayed the same
- Not sure

What are the biggest pitfalls of leadership today?

People managers in France (33%), Germany (41%), and the UK (38%) agree that one of the biggest pitfalls of leadership today is disregarding employees' work-life boundaries, which is problematic given how much employees value this today. Research by Aviva in the UK found that employees merit work-life balance more than salary—a contrast from a pre-pandemic survey from 2019 that reported the opposite. In a separate study undertaken in 2022, 41% of the 2,173 employees surveyed reported being attracted to their current role because of the work-life balance it provides, compared to 36% who cited salary.⁴

In all three markets, neglecting team morale has become an important problem, as have micromanagement issues in France (28%) and the UK (33%).



What has worsened in remote/hybrid leadership?



Recommended course on **communication**:
[Communication Strategies for a Virtual Age](#)

What is essential to lead successfully in remote and uncertain times?

In the UK (32%) and Germany (31%), empathy and compassion were essential traits to lead during uncertain times. Conversely, people managers in France (31%) felt practical skills like change management were more essential than these soft skills to lead successfully during this time.



What should leaders master in challenging times?

Recommended courses on:



Change management: [Managing the Company of the Future](#)



Empathy: [Emotional Intelligence: Cultivating Immensely Human Interactions](#)

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Leaders must step up to alleviate these concerns by offering assurances and flexibility. They must invest in new systems and ways of working which prioritize equitable access to information and enable more frictionless work.

Darren Murph
Head of Remote, GitLab
 GitLab

Lead organizations with Coursera

In today's complex business environment, leaders need to grow the business, drive culture across teams, and strategically plan for years into the future. Some employees are based remotely, while others go to the office regularly. It can get quite complicated to know how to lead at your best.

With the added complexity of traits and qualities of leadership differing across countries, [The Leadership Academy from Coursera](#) is designed to help your employees develop and grow the fast-evolving leadership skill sets they need to ensure the organization's success in the long run.

2. Leading teams: The rise of the middle manager and individual contributor

An underlying challenge of the remote and hybrid workplace is the intensity of leadership expected from less experienced employees, particularly middle managers. From motivating peers to maintaining company culture and driving business results, they're on the frontline with their teams while also answering to senior leadership on business results.

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Since we are remote, there is a high expectation to do your work without direct supervision. Every team member is responsible for communication, structuring decisions, and managing their workload individually.

Darren Murph
Head of Remote, GitLab


What are the most valued practices for leading teams remotely?

The most valued practices for leading teams remotely across markets were leading by example and empowering teams. Over half of the respondents in Germany and the UK considered leading by example essential to lead teams successfully. In France, this represented 43% of respondents. Empowering teams was also considered key by over half of the respondents in the UK and Germany and 39% in France.



How can leaders best motivate teams?



Recommended course on **leading by example:**
[Inspiring Leadership Through Emotional Intelligence](#)

What are the best ways for leaders to encourage team learning?

All three markets—France (20%), Germany (19%), and the UK (16%)—believe hiring for diversity can encourage learning in remote teams. In the UK, leading by example (24%) and encouraging a more flexible workplace to give employees the space to learn (21%) were also important.



What should leaders do to inspire employee learning in the workplace?

Recommended courses on:

- Smart time management:** [Work Smarter, Not Harder: Time Management for Personal & Professional Productivity](#) (UCI)
- Reward and recognition:** [Recognizing Team Members](#) (ADP)
- Hiring diverse teams:** [Inclusive Leadership: The Power of Workplace Diversity](#) (University of Colorado Boulder)

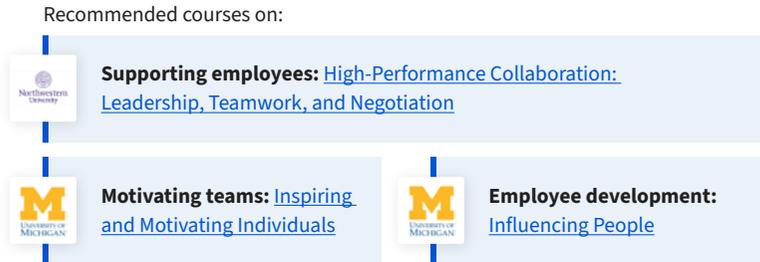
Leading teams with Coursera

New managers are essential to organizations tasked with leading a team while continuing to bring in the revenue the business needs to sustain itself. One of the most valued traits for leading teams successfully identified in our research was leading by example. But without proper training, rising middle managers may struggle with this, burn out, or hurt their direct reports' productivity and job satisfaction. The [Leadership Academy from Coursera](#) is designed to help you make training easy and flexible for this group to learn how to lead, collaborate, and thrive.

3. Leading transformation: The role of tech and data on leadership

Connected with the new challenges of remote and hybrid work is the discrepancy between tech, data, and leadership skills. With the increasing pace of digital transformation in the workplace, organizations rely on tech and data subject matter experts to solve difficult business problems.

But by promoting these technical leaders into managerial roles without proper leadership training, organizations hurt their business goals and team morale. Leadership, once again, is a must-have for everyone in the business.



What should effective leaders prioritize to lead at their best?

When asked what leaders should prioritize to lead successfully, all three markets agreed motivating teams, encouraging employee development, and learning and growing were most important. As a Gallup survey confers, at least 70% of the variance in team engagement can be explained through the manager or team leader.⁵ Leaders have a huge influence on whether their employees' strengths are used to do what employees know how to do best.⁶



What should effective leaders prioritize today to lead at their best?

Case study: Visible Alpha

Aware of the importance of helping technology experts build soft skills alongside technical ones to upgrade their team's leadership abilities, the innovative financial market analysis software company, [Visible Alpha](#), offers courses on Coursera in communication and team management to new hires, as well as to those looking to move into leadership roles.



We've found that Coursera is versatile enough to be useful for employees, managers, and executives. Our learners like that the content is from leading universities and institutions. Coursera's rich catalog means we can find leadership and communications courses relevant to our company's specific needs.

Alyssa Chen
Human Resources Director, Visible Alpha



Lead transformation by merging technical and soft skills harmoniously

Many employees with the right technical skills to transform the business lack the leadership skills to lead this transformation harmoniously throughout the organization. One of the most important things influential leaders should prioritize, according to people managers across the four countries surveyed, is motivating teams. The [Leadership Academy from Coursera](#) helps employees acquire these and other such skills and create the right environment to inspire and drive change.

4. Leading oneself: The evolution of the competencies of a leader

What is your preferred leadership style to lead in 2022?

Understanding one's leadership style has proven to be a key part of effective leadership practices.⁷ Our research shows that the preferred leadership style in 2022 varies significantly across markets, though no leadership style was selected as preferred by over 50% of the respondents in any market.

The UK and Germany find that leaders who believe in uncovering talents from everyone in the organization are most suited for today's world of work. In France, the Classic Entrepreneur, who focuses on financial results and quality, is preferred.

Cultural values play a role in a leader's style. By acknowledging their cross-cultural differences, leaders can improve their ability to function on a global scale.⁸

Preferred Leadership style ⁹	Preferred in	Definition
The Classic Entrepreneur	France	Focusing on tangible success, these leaders prioritize metrics related to financial results, such as costs & quality.
The Solutions Finder	United Kingdom Germany	Humble & self-effacing, these leaders believe in uncovering the talents of their colleagues & maximizing the collective genius of the organization.

“

With socioeconomic uncertainties on the horizon, leaders cannot afford to undermine credibility and jeopardize their reputation by compensating with overconfidence. Instead, they need to find a way to reassure their teams and approach the future with confidence using empathy and strong storytelling, relying on concrete information and particularly on strong data and strategies.

Darren Murph
Head of Remote, GitLab
 GitLab

Reflecting on oneself matters in leadership

Whether the preferred leadership style is Classic Entrepreneur, Modern Missionary, Solutions Finder, or any other style outside our researched classification, The [Leadership Academy from Coursera](#) helps develop strong foundational leadership skills to reflect from within and become an effective leader.

**Drive impact with better
leadership today**

Drive impact with better leadership today

In the face of global socioeconomic uncertainty, technological disruptions, and a hybrid workplace, effective leadership is more important and complex than ever.

Our research shows that leadership styles, traits, and valued qualities differ from country to country. Sometimes there is a discrepancy between the types of leaders employees need and those currently heading our teams and organizations.

To support this, learning leaders must prioritize upskilling programs in competencies that empower employees to lead transformation, provide the business with a competitive edge, reduce talent attrition, and allow leaders to be agile in navigating the changing needs of their teams across countries and cultures. Deploying ongoing soft skills training for all through affordable and scalable leadership programs, such as [Leadership Academy from Coursera](#), is an important first step.

**Ready to power your organization
with the next generation of leaders
and create high-performing teams?**

[Request a consultation today](#)

Endnotes

The evolution of leadership over time

1. [Leadership Theories and Styles](#). Western Governors University. 2020.

Leading in a digital revolution

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