Promoting remote workers' psychological health: Effective management practices during the COVID-19 crisis

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Abstract
The aim of this study was to identify specific management practices that promote the psychological health of remote workers in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. A two-round Delphi study was conducted among 28 teleworkers and 22 managers. A list of 60 specific management practices was presented and participants had to identify whether each one could be used in the current remote working context and, if so, how useful it was to promote psychological health at work. Results indicate that most specific management practices usually used in a face-to-face setting can also be used in a remote context (85%). Practices that show consideration, establishing work structure, and allowing flexibility were also identified as the most useful to promote remote workers' psychological health during the pandemic. This study contributes to the advancement of knowledge about specific management practices, remote working, and crisis management. It also suggests specific practices that managers can adopt to promote the psychological health of their employees during a period of crisis, even while managing from a distance.

KEYWORDS
COVID-19, crisis management, management practices, psychological health at work, remote workers

Résumé
Cet article a pour objectif d’identifier les pratiques de gestion favorisant la santé psychologique des télétravailleurs durant la crise de la COVID-19. Une étude Delphi a été réalisée auprès de télétravailleure·urs et de gestionnaires (n = 50). Parmi 60 pratiques de gestion, les participant·es devaient identifier celles qui s’appliquent en travail à distance et leur utilité afin de promouvoir la santé psychologique au travail, le cas échéant. Les résultats révèlent que les pratiques de gestion orientées vers la considération, la structure de travail et la flexibilité seraient les plus utiles pour promouvoir la santé psychologique. Cette étude suggère les pratiques de gestion à instaurer par les gestionnaires afin de favoriser la santé psychologique au travail dans un contexte de gestion à distance.

MOTS-CLÉS
COVID-19, gestion de crise, pratiques de gestion, santé psychologique au travail, télétravail
Working remotely is an emerging reality that has become essential due to health risks associated with the coronavirus pandemic. Indeed, due to social distancing measures, many workers have suddenly become teleworkers. In Canada, at the start of lockdown, 4.7 million workers became teleworkers (Statistics Canada, 2020). Remote working has several advantages. Indeed, this work arrangement offers flexibility as to where and when an employee can carry out their tasks, which can in turn result in better work–life balance and greater job autonomy (Igbaria & Guimaraes, 1999; Ter Hoeven & Van Zoonen, 2015). Moreover, it can increase employees' job satisfaction and commitment to the organization (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). However, this type of work arrangement also presents challenges for employees' psychological health. More precisely, working remotely drastically reduces social opportunities, which are important to preserve psychological health and overcome mental health difficulties, especially during stressful times (Sehmi et al., 2019). Recognized as one of the factors that most influences psychological health at work, managerial support in such a situation appears to be essential (Biggs et al., 2014). However, few studies have explored the most appropriate management practices for promoting employee psychological health in a context of working remotely, and still fewer have done so in the context of a public health crisis. To fill this gap, the aim of this study is to identify which management practices are most useful for promoting the psychological health of remote workers during the COVID-19 crisis.

1 | THEORETICAL CONTEXT

1.1 | Managers' influence on psychological health at work

Previously considered a one-dimensional concept characterized by the absence of disease (Bruchon-Schweitzer, 2002; Seligman, 2008), psychological health is now recognized as a complete state of well-being comprising not only the absence of disease, but also the presence of positive manifestations (Kelloway & Day, 2005; Keyes, 2005; World Health Organization, 1946). Thus, psychological well-being and psychological distress constitute two distinct but linked concepts, and both are necessary in order to adequately represent the construct of psychological health (Kelloway & Day, 2005; Keyes, 2003). In the workplace, several determinants of workers' psychological health have been identified in the scientific literature (for instance workload, autonomy, and social support) (Brun et al., 2003; Coutu et al., 2011; Danna & Griffin, 1999). Among these, supervisor support appears to be particularly important. Indeed, studies have confirmed that managers can positively or negatively influence employees' psychological health at work by increasing or reducing exposure to psychosocial risk factors (Arnold, 2017; Gilbreath & Karimi, 2012; Kelloway & Barling, 2010; St-Hilaire, 2012), such as conflicting demands between work and home, lack of control, low participation in decision making, workload, and social isolation (Cox et al., 2000; Leka & Cox, 2010). More precisely, previous research has shown that transformational leadership has multiple benefits for employees, especially in terms of psychological health (Arnold et al., 2007; Kelloway & Barling, 2010; Kelloway & Day, 2005; Skakon et al., 2010). This leadership style is typically characterized by managers who influence employees through a motivating vision and actions, fosters professional development, demonstrates individualized consideration by paying particular attention to employee's needs and shows empathy (Antonakis et al., 2003; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Kelloway & Barling, 2010; St-Hilaire, 2012). However, little is known about the specific actions managers can adopt to embody this style of leadership (Kelloway & Barling, 2000; St-Hilaire, 2012; Westerlund et al., 2010). Studies have demonstrated that specific management practices, defined as managers' concrete behaviors (St-Hilaire, 2012; St-Hilaire et al., 2018), are a better predictor of well-being and overall health than more general factors such as leadership style (Gilbert et al., 2017; Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; Mullen & Kelloway, 2009). To date, two qualitative studies have identified 155 specific management practices that promote psychological health at work (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; St-Hilaire et al., 2018), which can be classified into nine themes: consideration, work structure, communication, cooperation, initiative and flexibility, professional development, work appreciation and recognition, team consolidation, and ethic (see Table 1 for the definition of each theme).
Management practices in a remote working context during a public health crisis

During the COVID-19 pandemic, working remotely has allowed companies to stay in business while respecting government recommendations to avoid employees gathering together at their workplace (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). However, it has also posed new challenges for managers. Indeed, since remote management has distinctive features such as reduced face-to-face interaction (Nayani et al., 2018; Nielsen et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021), a manager's influence over their subordinates is different in that specific context (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). Thus, the absence of physical proximity is likely to offer fewer opportunities for managers to implement some behaviors that aim to, for example, show consideration, serve as a role model for employees, encourage desired behaviors or reduce worker stressors (Howell et al., 2005; Kelloway & Barling, 2010; Nayani et al., 2018; Nielsen et al., 2019). Moreover, remote workers are more at risk of feeling isolated or lonely (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Wang et al., 2021). Studies suggest that establishing a work structure by clearly defining roles and expectations as well as showing consideration by inquiring into the level of comfort and well-being of employees could help break the isolation that remote workers can experience (Hamouche, 2020; Marshall et al., 2007; Mulki & Jaramillo, 2011; Watson, 2007). Studies also demonstrate that social support provided by a supervisor can have an effect on psychological strain and job satisfaction by helping workers to overcome the feeling of isolation experienced when working remotely (Bentley et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2021). However, the stress caused by the COVID-19 crisis may also generate new needs among employees that manager must take into account. Indeed, Prasad et al. (2020) found that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, remote workers' psychological well-being has been influenced by occupational stressors such as role ambiguity, organizational climate, and job dissatisfaction, issues that can be addressed by implementing appropriate management practices. Also, studies in different crisis contexts indicate that maintaining communication can help to reduce psychological strain and protect workers' psychological health (Biggs et al., 2014; Brooks et al., 2018; Greer & Payne, 2014; Suzuki et al., 2012). Overall, these studies suggest that demonstrating consideration and support, providing structure, and maintaining communication promote the psychological health of remote workers in a crisis context, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, to date no study has identified all of the specific management practices that can be applied and are most useful in such a context. Identifying these concrete behaviors is essential in order to equip managers and enable them to support their employees during this unprecedented crisis. Thus, in order to advance knowledge, the present study aims to achieve consensus among experts on specific management practices that can be used to promote remote workers' psychological health in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

### METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 Method

In order to achieve these objectives, a two-round Delphi study was conducted. This research method involves consulting experts in order to reach a consensus on a specific topic (Keeney et al., 2010). The Delphi method increasingly recognizes various types of expertise (Jorm, 2015). Since the subject of this study is the usefulness of management practices for promoting
psychological health at work, two different panels of experts were consulted: a group of employees who work remotely; and a group of managers who supervise remote workers. Employees were considered to be experts in their own experience, while managers provided both relevant expertise regarding the possibility of implementing these specific management practices as well as observations about their usefulness. In order to ensure the stability of the results and prevent a single individual’s opinion from having an inordinate influence on the results, a minimum of 20 participants were recruited per panel (Jorm, 2015). With fewer than 20 participants, results could have been overly affected by participants’ personal characteristics. The research ethics review board of the Université du Québec à Montréal approved the project.

2.2 | Participants recruitment

Participants were recruited through an advertisement posted on Facebook and LinkedIn. Individuals interested in participating were able to click on the link included in the ad and were then directed to a secure online questionnaire. In order to recruit more managers, associations in the management field (for instance, in chambers of commerce) also broadcast our ad. To participate in the study, participants had to be at least 18 years old and working remotely or managing remote workers at least three days (about 21 h) a week. Recruitment took place from May to July 2020.

2.3 | Procedure

In the first round of the study, an online questionnaire with a list of 60 specific management practices (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; St-Hilaire et al., 2018) was presented to participants. Participants were asked to indicate if each specific practice could be used in their current remote working context (yes or no). If yes, they were also asked to evaluate how useful this practice would be to promote workers’ psychological health at work on a Likert scale from 1 = very little useful to 5 = extremely useful. Additional lines at the end of the questionnaire allowed participants to add specific management practices not mentioned in the original questionnaire but considered relevant to their specific context. The specific management practices added by participants in the first round were analyzed by the two authors and included in the second round if they were not redundant. Upon beginning the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide their email address so that they could be contacted for the second round.

In order to proceed with the second round, participants from the first round were contacted by email. They were then asked to evaluate the applicability and usefulness of all the specific management practices listed in the questionnaire about which participants had diverging opinions and all the new practices proposed by participants in the first round. Participants were informed of the result (percentage of agreement among participants) obtained for each of the re-evaluated specific management practices in the first round and could decide to change or maintain their initial choices.

2.4 | Analysis

The percentage of participants indicating a specific management practice as applicable in the current context of remote working and crisis was calculated. As in the study by Yap et al. (2014), specific management practice was retained if at least 90% of all participants agreed that it could be used in the current remote working context. Specific management practices were re-evaluated in the second round if at least 90% of participants from one of the two panels agreed that the practice could be used in the current context, or if 80%–89% of all participants agreed that the practice could be used in the current remote working context. Management practices not meeting those criteria were rejected. Inter-judge agreement was used to classify specific management practices retained after the two rounds into the nine themes presented in Table 1 (inter-judge agreement: 74%) and an average usefulness score (from 1 to 5) was calculated. The analyses were conducted on all participants’ responses, as well as on those of each of the two panels separately.

3 | RESULTS

A total of 50 experts participated in the first round of this study, and 40 of them participated in the second round (retention rate: 80%). Out of the 50 experts questioned, 28 were part of the employee panel, and 22, the managerial panel. Participants were between 21 and 62 years old and 80% were women. Participants were mainly drawn from different work industries, such as finance and insurance (30%), services (24%) and education (12%). New remote workers (less than three months) represented 54% of the sample, while 46% of participants had worked remotely workers prior to COVID-19 (three months or more) (respectively 24% = three months to less than six months;
4% = six months to less than one year; 4% = one year to less than two years; 14% = more than two years).

A total of 39 specific management practices were retained from Round 1, and 14 new (n = 2) or re-evaluated practices (n = 12) were retained from Round 2, for a total of 53 specific management practices that can be used in the remote working context related to the COVID-19 crisis (see Figure 1). The two new practices retained after Round 2 belong to the consideration category (Inform employees about available assistance programs (e.g., EAP); Recognize the difficulties that employees may experience due to the context). As shown in Table 2, all 53 practices were rated as being more than at least moderately useful (score > 3). Among the 12 specific management practices that were rejected (Table 3), most referred to work structure (for instance, refuse new mandates in case of work overload), consideration (for instance, distinguish between personal and professional relations), and cooperation (for instance, strive to obtain resources for the team).

Results revealed few differences between panels concerning the applicability of specific management practices in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. Nevertheless, employees assessed practices that involved engaging in joking as being more applicable than managers did (employees: 96.4% vs. managers: 86.4%). Also, managers rated the management practice that consists of providing the information necessary to progress as more applicable than employees did (employees: 89.2% vs. managers: 100%).

Findings also indicated that specific management practices related to work structure and consideration
| Rank | Specific management practices                                                                 | Category                                    | M     | SD  |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------|-----|
| 1.   | Allow flexibility in organizing work schedules and holidays                                    | Initiative and flexibility                   | 4.69  | 0.55|
| 2.   | Inform employees in advance of unusual events or important changes                            | Communication                               | 4.47  | 0.59|
| 3.   | Reorganize the workload                                                                        | Work structure                              | 4.47  | 0.66|
| 4.   | Ask about workloads or problems                                                                | Consideration                               | 4.44  | 0.68|
| 5.   | Demonstrate willingness to listen                                                               | Consideration                               | 4.42  | 0.65|
| 6.   | Recognize the difficulties that employees may experience due to the context                    | Consideration                               | 4.41  | 0.64|
| 7.   | Demonstrate availability                                                                        | Consideration                               | 4.39  | 0.61|
| 8.   | Being transparent                                                                              | Ethic                                       | 4.38  | 0.67|
| 9.   | Take advantage of subordinates strengths and interests                                          | Professional development                     | 4.37  | 0.78|
| 10.  | Highlight subordinates successes                                                                | Work appreciation and recognition            | 4.37  | 0.78|
| 11.  | Communicate in a straightforward manner                                                          | Communication                               | 4.35  | 0.71|
| 12.  | Give clear instructions for tasks                                                               | Work structure                              | 4.33  | 0.69|
| 13.  | Take subordinates point of view into account                                                    | Initiative and flexibility                   | 4.28  | 0.65|
| 14.  | Allow room for error                                                                           | Ethic                                       | 4.24  | 0.86|
| 15.  | Provide material and human resources necessary to complete tasks                                | Cooperation                                 | 4.24  | 0.59|
| 16.  | Hold team meetings                                                                             | Team consolidation                          | 4.20  | 0.82|
| 17.  | Demonstrate flexibility in implementing rules, according to the needs of subordinates          | Consideration                               | 4.19  | 0.74|
| 18.  | Provide information necessary to progress                                                        | Communication                               | 4.19  | 0.61|
| 19.  | Encourage mutual aid within the team                                                            | Team consolidation                          | 4.17  | 0.76|
| 20.  | Care about subordinates state                                                                   | Consideration                               | 4.16  | 0.77|
| 21.  | Give regular feedback on completed work                                                         | Work structure                              | 4.15  | 0.82|
| 22.  | Improve working methods                                                                        | Work structure                              | 4.11  | 0.65|
| 23.  | Allow freedom in performing tasks                                                               | Initiative and flexibility                   | 4.11  | 0.85|
| 24.  | Set realistic goals for subordinates development                                                | Professional development                     | 4.11  | 0.65|
| 25.  | Highlight subordinates skills and achievements to the team                                      | Work appreciation and recognition            | 4.10  | 0.83|
| 26.  | Explain decisions                                                                              | Communication                               | 4.09  | 0.75|
| 27.  | Play down the situation (scope of a task or deadlines to meet)                                 | Consideration                               | 4.08  | 0.71|
| 28.  | Be cordial during virtual exchanges (email, Skype, Teams...)                                    | Consideration                               | 4.08  | 0.99|
| 29.  | Hold individual meetings                                                                       | Communication                               | 4.08  | 0.94|
| 30.  | Admit mistakes                                                                                 | Ethic                                       | 4.06  | 0.86|
| 31.  | Make decisions as a team                                                                        | Team consolidation                          | 4.06  | 0.63|
| 32.  | Ask for advice/consult with subordinates                                                       | Initiative and flexibility                   | 4.06  | 0.82|
| 33.  | Inform employees about available assistance programs (e.g., EAP)                                | Consideration                               | 4.05  | 0.89|
| 34.  | Working with subordinate on tasks                                                               | Cooperation                                 | 4.04  | 0.71|
| 35.  | Solve problems quickly                                                                         | Work structure                              | 4.04  | 0.74|
| 36.  | Respond to requests/needs quickly                                                               | Work structure                              | 4.02  | 0.74|
| 37.  | Provide emotional support                                                                       | Consideration                               | 4.00  | 0.86|
were regarded as the most useful to promote psychological health at work in a remote and crisis context. Of the top 10 specific management practices evaluated as most useful, five related to establishing work structure (for instance, reorganize the workload) and demonstrating consideration to employees (for instance, ask about workload or problems; recognize the difficulties that employees may experience due to the context; demonstrate willingness to listen; demonstrate availability). However, the most useful specific management practice identified by both panels related to allowing flexibility in work schedules. The item inform employees in advance of unusual events or important changes, related to communication, was also identified by participants as one of the most useful practices. Specific management practices rated as less useful were notifying employees of their presence (communication); organizing virtual social activities (team consolidation); recognizing special events (such as birthdays or promotions) (consideration); and delegating the execution of a task (initiative and flexibility).

Overall, panels of employees and managers agreed on the usefulness of almost all specific management practices. However, two specific management practices related to consideration (Demonstrate willingness to listen; $M = 4.62$, $SD = 0.50$) and professional development (Take advantage of subordinates’ strengths and interests; $M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.60$) were among managers’ top five, while they did not reach the top ten for employees and were rated respectively in twelfth ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.70$) and thirteenth ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.90$) position. Conversely, the specific management practice being

**TABLE 2 (Continued)**

| Rank | Specific management practices                                         | Category                      | $M$  | $SD$  |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------|-------|
| 38.  | Support subordinates actions to one’s own superiors                   | Team consolidation            | 4.00 | 0.48  |
| 39.  | Share objectives                                                       | Communication                 | 3.98 | 0.86  |
| 40.  | Encourage training                                                     | Professional development      | 3.92 | 0.67  |
| 41.  | Communicate the organization’s vision                                  | Communication                 | 3.91 | 0.95  |
| 42.  | Monitor progress on files or deadlines                                 | Work structure                | 3.89 | 0.81  |
| 43.  | Give advice for completing a task                                      | Cooperation                   | 3.88 | 0.69  |
| 44.  | Get to know subordinates. Keep informed about one’s subordinates       | Consideration                 | 3.87 | 0.82  |
| 45.  | Encourage initiative-taking                                            | Initiative and flexibility     | 3.87 | 1.00  |
| 46.  | Provide mentoring/coaching                                             | Professional development      | 3.87 | 0.81  |
| 47.  | Highlight subordinates’ skills and achievements to the management      | Work appreciation and recognition | 3.84 | 0.80  |
| 48.  | Engage in pleasancries with subordinates                               | Consideration                 | 3.80 | 0.93  |
| 49.  | Maintain a decision (be consistent)                                    | Work structure                | 3.78 | 0.82  |
| 50.  | Recognize special events (birthday, promotion)                         | Consideration                 | 3.74 | 1.00  |
| 51.  | Delegate the execution of a task                                       | Initiative and flexibility     | 3.72 | 0.72  |
| 52.  | Notify of his/her presence                                             | Communication                 | 3.57 | 0.77  |
| 53.  | Organize virtual social activities                                     | Team consolidation            | 3.32 | 0.94  |

Note: $M$, means, $SD$, standard deviation; specific management practices with the same score are presented in alphabetical order.

**TABLE 3** Specific management practices rejected for promoting psychological health of remote workers in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, according to panels’ perspective of usefulness

- Allow employees to reduce their working hours
- Carry out tasks instead of subordinates, if required
- Defend subordinates acts to other authorities
- Distinguish between personal and professional relations
- Make employee’s psychological health diagnosis
- Make small talk (talk about everything and nothing)
- Protect subordinate’s personal lives outside working hours
- Recognize development needs of subordinates
- Reduce productivity expectations due to context
- Refuse new mandates in case of work overload
- Strive to obtain resources for the team
- Treat all subordinates equitably
transparent ranked in employees’ top ten (M = 4.46, SD = 0.647, in fourth position), but not managers’ (M = 4.27, SD = 0.703, thirteenth position). Furthermore, specific management practices that focus on work structure (Give clear instructions for tasks; managers: M = 4.23, SD = 0.43, eighteenth position/employees: M = 4.41, SD = 0.84, seventh position), communication (Provide information necessary to progress; managers: M = 4.09, SD = 0.61, twenty-ninth position/employees: M = 4.28, SD = 0.61, eleventh position), and consideration (Inform employees about available assistance programs (e.g., EAP); managers: M = 3.89, SD = 0.90, forty-fourth position/employees: M = 4.19, SD = 0.87, eighteenth position) were rated as more useful by employees than by managers. Also, interestingly, the item taking subordinates’ point of view into account, which refers to the themes of initiative and flexibility, was rated more useful by managers than by employees (managers: M = 4.38, SD = 0.669, seventh position/employees: M = 4.19, SD = 0.634, nineteenth position).

Finally, independent t-tests were performed to determine the impact of previous working experience on the results of the study. Results show that there were only two management practices (out of a total of 60) for which usefulness was evaluated differently according to the length of past experience working remotely. Indeed, the management practice of providing material and human resources necessary to complete tasks was rated as less useful by new remote workers (less than three months) than by more experienced remote workers (three months or more). Conversely, the management practice related to monitoring progress on files or deadlines was evaluated as more useful by new remote workers than by remote workers with more experience.

4 | DISCUSSION

4.1 | Summary

This study aims to identify specific management practices that can be used to promote remote workers’ psychological health in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and also to establish which specific management practices were considered most useful to promote remote workers’ psychological health during the COVID-19 crisis.

4.2 | Contributions to scholarship

A total of 53 specific management practices were identified as relevant. Most of these practices were on the original list of 60 specific management practices derived from the scientific literature (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; St-Hilaire et al., 2018), indicating that similar practices can be used to promote psychological health in both traditional work situations and in remote working and crisis contexts. Since the body of research on remote working may in some cases lack contextual relevance in the current COVID-19 pandemic (Wang et al., 2021), these results contribute significantly to the literature by establishing which management practices are indeed relevant during a public health crisis. However, two new practices that have particular relevance in remote working and crisis contexts also emerged from participants’ proposals and fall in the consideration theme. Indeed, these newly retained management practices suggest that, in the context of the stress caused by the COVID-19 crisis, it is important for managers to inform employees about available resources (such as employee assistance programs [EAP]) as well as to recognize difficulties that employees may experience.

Even though experts reached consensus on the applicability of most specific management practices, there were a few differences between panels in evaluating the applicability of certain specific management practices. Indeed, confirming findings of a previous qualitative study, employees rated engaging in jokes with subordinates as more applicable than managers did (St-Hilaire et al., 2018). Thus, although for most employees this practice can be applied in their remote and crisis context, some managers prefer to demonstrate their consideration in a more formal demeanour by, for example, informing employees about available resources and demonstrating their willingness to listen. As well, providing the information necessary to progress was rated as more applicable by managers than employees. These different perspectives may be explained by the uncertain climate due to the unprecedented public health crisis related to the COVID-19 virus and the lack of available information. Indeed, most remote workers had little to no experience in working remotely prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and neither they nor their organization was prepared for the changes associated with this situation (Wang et al., 2021). Also, employees may have thought that since little relevant information is available, it was difficult for their manager to disseminate it in order to ensure progress on tasks.

The present study also seeks to establish which specific management practices were considered most useful to promote remote workers’ psychological health during the COVID-19 crisis. Confirming results reported in the literature, findings suggest that practices related to work structure and consideration were considered as most useful to help to break the isolation experienced by
remote workers (Hamouche, 2020; Marshall et al., 2007; Mulki & Jaramillo, 2011; Watson, 2007) and impact employees’ psychological health concretely. Allowing flexibility in organizing work schedules and holidays was also rated as one of the most useful practices by both managers and employees. This result may be explained in part by the fact that, in a remote working context, the lack of face-to-face interactions may lessen the influence of managers on how and when employees execute their work. As well, employees’ specific personal situation during the COVID-19 crisis (such as the presence of children or dependents at home while working) may also explain why this practice was so highly rated. Indeed, research shows that remote workers may experience work–home conflict as a major challenge (Wang et al., 2021), but one that managers who demonstrate flexibility can help them overcome.

Some differences were found between panels regarding the usefulness of specific management practices. Findings suggest that employees considered having clear and relevant information in order to be able to carry out their tasks more useful than managers did. These results are consistent with previous findings that indicate that clear communication has a positive impact on well-being, workload, and stress (Day et al., 2012; Fonner & Roloff, 2012; Madlock, 2013). Since poor communication can hinder professional relationships (Camacho et al., 2018), managers must adjust their management practices in order to facilitate the transmission of important information (Wang et al., 2021). Moreover, employees were also more likely to think that promoting available resources (such as EAP) would improve their psychological health at work. This management practice highlights the fact that even though managers play an important role in protecting the mental health of their employees (Biron et al., 2016; Kuoppala et al., 2008; Nayani et al., 2018), other levels of intervention (individual, group, organization) need to be considered as well (Nielsen et al., 2017).

4.3 Applied implications

The findings of this study have important practical implications for employees and managers. Although psychological health at work was already acknowledged to be an important issue for managers to consider, the COVID-19 crisis may highlight particular needs among employees that must be addressed. First of all, this study establishes that most specific management practices that promote psychological health at work can be adapted and adopted in a remote working environment. In addition, our findings provide information to managers about which specific management practices are the most useful to promote psychological health among remote employees in the context of COVID-19. Since remote working is certain to become part of the new organizational reality (Hern, 2020; Sytch & Greer, 2020), management practices identified as being the most useful for promoting psychological health at work in the context of COVID-19 may also apply in a remote working context outside a public health crisis. Indeed, the results corroborate previous studies indicating that specific management practices oriented toward showing consideration and instauring work structure are most useful (Hamouche, 2020; Marshall et al., 2007; Mulki & Jaramillo, 2011; Watson, 2007). On the other hand, allowing flexibility appears to be particularly important in the context of a crisis, where changes occur often and quickly, and workers are subjected to conditions over which they have little control. However, this type of practice could also remain relevant outside of a crisis context, since many workers consider the flexibility that teleworking offers as one of its most valuable assets (Fonner & Roloff, 2010; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Finally, although these categories were identified as the most useful, managers must put in place diversified management practices from each theme to ensure workers’ psychological health and optimal functioning.

4.4 Limitations and future research directions

Finally, this study has some limitations that should be mentioned. Since recruitment took place a few months after the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, managers and employees were probably still in an adjustment period and more studies are needed to verify if the present results still apply as remote working and crisis continue. Also, our results show that former experience in teleworking influenced the perception of some participants regarding two specific management practices that refer to work structure and cooperation. Previous studies have shown that experience as a remote worker can affect psychological health and productivity (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kossek et al., 2006; Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). The present study results suggest that remote workers’ needs, including for support, may change over time based on their remote working experience. Indeed, they may need more support and structure in the beginning and more flexibility and autonomy once this type of work...
arrangement is in place. Further research is needed to better understand this evolution. Moreover, each employee’s personal situation (such as the presence of children at home, or an inadequate workspace) could have influenced their needs in terms of management practices. Future studies are needed to explore the reality of each of these specific situations. Furthermore, all participants were recruited from Canada, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Additional research is also needed to empirically examine the association between specific management practices, psychological health at work and other indicators of work functioning, such as presenteeism, among workers from various industries.

5 | CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study contributes to our knowledge about specific management practices that can be used in a remote working context during a public health crisis. It also highlights which specific management practices are more useful to promote the psychological health of remote workers. Findings may provide guidance for developing training to assist managers in better supporting their employees in this regard, especially during extraordinarily stressful crisis situations.

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