Management Styles for a COVID World

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The sudden transition to remote work environments is impacting leaders' ability to manage their teams as effectively as they had before, especially for organizations with limited remote-work experience. Whether the focus is performance management, work distribution, or team engagement, leaders must evolve their management styles to effectively support their employees in the current climate.

An organization's ability to engage their workforce is most apparent at the managerial level, where leadership styles will need to be tailored to teams. This article discusses six common leadership styles, their potential advantages, and how to adapt these styles to more effectively manage your team in the remote environment.

Leadership in Crisis. In times of crisis, optimally managing your team is imperative for maintaining team morale, meeting deadlines, preserving company culture, and retaining talent. Leaders should be especially sensitive to how they lead during this time as traditional leadership styles may prove less effective in the remote work environment due to limited in-person interactions, modified engagement cadences, limited resources, and shifts in enterprise priorities.

With in-person interactions unavailable, leaders may have less visibility into individual work contributions and the team's working pace. Leaders will need to productively engage employees and drive work execution while avoiding the effects of micromanagement. Additionally, in a time when COVID-19 can have significant personal impacts, leaders will need to be increasingly supportive and adaptive managerially to properly navigate stresses brought on by this unprecedented situation.

As employees' uncertainty continue to evolve, they will look to their managers for guidance, accentuating the importance for leaders to provide clear directions, set actionable objectives, and lead with empathy. It is imperative for leaders to self-evaluate their management styles against the current climate and tailor their leadership styles accordingly.

Tailoring Your Style. According to Daniel Goleman, renowned psychologist and author of *Emotional Intelligence*[1], leaders primarily exhibit traits related to six leadership styles. These styles include the coach, consensus seeker, director, driver, relationship builder, or visionary[2]. Although leaders may have a dominant leadership style, the most effective leaders can situationally "bridge the gap" by flexing into complimentary styles. On the following page you will find descriptions of each style, along with pitfalls to avoid by "bridging the gap" to adjust for the COVID-19 remote work environment we find ourselves in.

[1]Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ.*
[2]Daniel Goleman, *The Emotionally Intelligent Leader.*

Style	Description	Notable Leaders
Coach	Coaches prioritize team development, delegating tasks to support growth while providing consistent feedback and guidance to help the team navigate difficult tasks. However, if feedback is not presented sensitively, employees may feel undermined by the leader.	Warren Buffet Satya Nadella
Consensus Seeker	Consensus seekers prioritize consensus-driven forums to support joint team decisions and provide an avenue for team members to provide feedback and steer vision. Although employees will feel heard, the team may find themselves involved in a prolonged decision-making process.	Angela Merkel Tony Hsieh
Director	Directors have a clear vision of how to reach team goals and provide clear, tactical directions to employees, detailing exactly how tasks should be executed. Directors excel in time-crunch situations but may stifle team creativity due to their inflexible nature.	Steve Jobs Winston Churchill
Driver	Drivers expect excellence and high competence from employees, driving the team to work quickly and efficiently to garner immediate results. These teams tend to excel but may often feel overwhelmed to deliver, which is especially apparent in already overwhelming times.	Bill Gates Elon Musk
Relationship Builder	Relationship Builders focus on developing team harmony and boosting morale through the fostering of relationships and improvement of communications. The fostering of relationships can drive ideation and innovation, but if overemphasized, can also deteriorate quality of work.	Bob Iger Melinda Gates
Visionary	Visionaries set a clear purpose and mobilize employees accordingly while taking a hands-off approach to team management. Due to the entrepreneurial environment and limited direction they provide, team members may find themselves unsure of tactical next steps.	Walt Disney Jeff Bezos

Styles to Promote. Each management style provides leaders an opportunity to lean into other styles to optimally support their team in a remote work environment. However, two styles are likely to be particularly effective given the current climate: the visionary and coach. Aspects of these two styles should be universally applied to foster relationships and camaraderie and focus on encouraging flexible and frequent communication. Both styles prioritize the individual, showing the employee increased empathy during a difficult situation. They also provide flexibility in allowing employees to execute work on their own schedule but provide ongoing feedback and guidance, as necessary. However, be wary of providing too much leeway and not enough tactical direction as non-motivated employees may take advantage of this relaxed structure.

Styles to Limit. Leaders should look to reduce emphasis on director and consensus seeker styles. Although these two styles are nearly opposites; one style imposes strict direction with limited feedback, while the other focuses on gathering as much feedback as possible, each can run into issues in supporting a remote team. The director is likely to be too prescriptive for the unknowns found within the current climate. With increased sensitivity during times of crises, employees may struggle with strict guidelines that can't easily adjust to their new remote environment. On the other hand, the consensus seeker encourages collaboration and teamwork, but may need to increase its emphasis on structure and direction.

Conclusion. Leaders can leverage these insights to support their development as a more effective and reliable leader. Learning to flex leadership styles to accommodate new situations lends itself to more effective managers and more engaged employees. To learn more about effective management, look out for future posts from our Organizational Transformation Center of Excellence.

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