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Leading Remotely: What Managers Need to Keep Teams Engaged

BY SOFIA KLUCH



STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Remote managers may struggle to engage their teams
 - Communication, accountability and individualization are key
 - Leaders need to individualize how they support their managers
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Managing remotely can be complicated. Add a dash of national emergency, and it becomes even more challenging to engage employees. As organizations across the world transition to a partial or fully work-from-home environment in response to COVID-19, understanding what managers need to lead remotely is a must.

Of course, not all managers view remote work the same way, especially when it's driven by circumstance rather than choice. Some managers will embrace a little separation from their teams -- they may even see it as an opportunity to get some uninterrupted work in. Others get energy and focus from their people and will feel isolated and less in a position to help their teams and their organization when they aren't in the office every day. So while some managers are busy decorating their home office and celebrating not having to commute, others will resent forced isolation and feeling disconnected from their people.

And because 70% of an individual's engagement is driven by their manager, it's crucial that leaders individualize to best support them.

Where Remote Managers May Struggle

There are three things that managers have to do perfectly to create the right level of engagement for their people. All managers are likely to struggle in some of these categories at one time or another, even without the added strain of managing through substantial distractions.

1. **Individualization.** When people are in the office, it's easier to have one set of rules for everyone. But when many employees are working from home without a dedicated office, when children are not in school or daycare, and when

neighborhood broadband connections are stressed to capacity -- individualization is king.

Managers have to figure out where structure is required (e.g., no crying children during client calls) and where it is flexible -- like shortening meetings by five or 10 minutes to allow people to transition between calls and reset an activity for a child at home. There may be a need to accommodate flexibility to hours worked (e.g., shortened schedules), available hours (e.g., schedule all meetings in the afternoon when a child is napping), or the meaning of "close of business" (COB) to mean midnight or even 8:00 a.m. the following day. Managers need everyone to be able to give their best and positively impact the organization, and they need to create a space so their employees can do so.

2. **Communication.** While many managers are effective communicators, taking that show on the road -- or more specifically, *home* -- means that the only method of communication is what your managers are providing. If an email tone is too harsh, there is no facial expression to soften the sting. If your question during a phone conference feels abrupt, there might not be video that shows you literally leaning into the conversation in interest instead of a perceived attack. For this reason, videoconferencing may be ideal and should be encouraged.

Much of our language is nonverbal. When managers are forced to limit the nonverbal cues available to their direct reports, they increase the chance for miscommunication, defensiveness and conflict. Managers need to communicate with their teams in multiple ways and through multiple mediums to keep expectations clear, to reinforce priorities, and to help understand and address barriers to maximizing their team's work while they are away from the office.

Managers need everyone to be able to give their best and positively impact the organization, and they need to create a space so their employees can do so.

Managers should ask how employees prefer to be contacted. Are text messages OK for urgent issues, or is that an invasion of privacy or stressful? Do they have everything they need to videoconference comfortably? Managers should also proactively schedule weekly check-ins with their teams, replacing the informal office conversations that relationships are made of.

3. **Accountability.** When everyone is physically present, it tends to be easier to evaluate the level of effort people are putting in and the output your team is generating. The reason most remote employees *can* work remotely is that they're doing the type of work that may be harder to count or measure productivity against. That is no reason to neglect accountability.

Managers must create or improve upon their systems for holding their teams accountable when everyone is working remotely. This is based in communication but includes tools for measuring timelines and deliverables, check-ins, and evaluation of submitted work. It's important that everyone understands the quality of work expected from them while working remotely -- and that your managers are prepared to assess and hold team members accountable for their continued performance.

For example, managers can use online task or project management tools so that everyone has visibility on what's important *now*. Managers can also proactively set check-in meetings for certain projects to encourage progress on specific pieces of work. It also doesn't hurt to ask helpful coaching questions such as, "What challenges might you face in getting this done?" Get the invisible gorilla or elephant into the conversation.

Where Remote Managers Thrive

In times of crisis, it's worth remembering the benefits of remote work. Managing remotely allows individuals to get creative, leverage their strengths, and engage with their teams in different and meaningful ways.

Your managers are in the best position to minimize any negative effects of working from home. They are also best positioned to create new methods and processes for getting things done. Here is how you can set your managers up for success:

1. **Trust them.** Give them latitude to embrace acceptable risk in trying new things. Managers are going to have to get creative on everything, from creating an engaged work team to meeting clients' needs in a very uncertain time. Managing remotely will include taking some risks. Whether it is taking a videoconference outside, creating new documentation procedures or sending care packages, let your managers innovate on the best ways to connect their teams and get work done.
2. **Be open to discovery.** Be open to finding out things about your business that might surprise you. You may have a team or role that you didn't think could be effective remotely -- or inversely, a team that you were confident in that ends up struggling. Be open to learning lessons from this experience and even having some of your thinking about your work, your organization and your customers turned upside down as a massive field experiment in remote work is currently underway.

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Ask your managers what they are finding and learning, and think about how that evidence supports or rejects your perceptions of remote work for your organization.

3. **Evolve your culture.** As humans, we tend to empathize best with situations we have personally experienced. There is a huge opportunity for us to experience remote work firsthand that we would otherwise not encounter. This can make our overall work culture more inclusive and more friendly to a variety of workers, including those who will work from home long after COVID-19 subsides. This allows us to think more strategically about when, why and how remote work should be approached in the long run.

What Remote Managers Need

Once your managers are equipped with the tools they need to manage their teams and keep your organization moving forward, what they need next is your support to do all the right things -- perfect communication, accountability and individualization -- which you can provide in three specific ways:

1. **Listen.** Ask your managers what they need, and listen to their answers. Each manager will have their own perspective on the situation -- good, bad or otherwise. And depending on their approach, they may need different things from you. It's best not to assume how the situation is affecting them; let them share their experience and needs so you can tailor your approach to supporting them.
2. **Communicate frequently.** Strong leadership inspires everyone. Ask your managers to find out what people need to hear from their local managers and what they want to hear from the top. Position your support around areas like accountability and quality, and encourage efforts to keep everyone engaged and connected while remote.
3. **Expand technology support.** Even your most tech-savvy manager will be dealing with a variety of technical difficulties if they are not used to working remotely. Ensure your technology team is ready to assist managers and their teams. Open all available resources to keep work occurring from anywhere and everywhere.

Although many managers are leading their teams from a distance for the first time, they can succeed if they keep the fundamentals of excellent management in mind -- and if they have the support from you, their leader. A positive mindset, a listening ear and greater flexibility can make all the difference in a time of crisis.

Explore other resources for supporting managers and their teams:

- Watch the webinar "[COVID-19: Managing Your Workplace Through Disruption](#)."
- Read a compilation of our research and advice on [employee engagement](#).
- Download our perspective paper [Employee Burnout: Causes and Cures](#).

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Unleashing the Power of Diversity Through Inclusive Leadership

Executive Summary



Executive Summary

The legal profession has long been focused on hiring and promoting diverse talent -- yet progress has been slow. Although people of color (including those who identify as Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, or Latinx) comprise a growing number of law firm associates, they remain significantly under-represented at higher levels. Many factors contribute to this situation, but one is indisputable: attrition rates for attorneys who are people of color have been increasing in lock-step with hiring rates.¹ To truly accelerate diversity in their ranks, it's clear that lawyers need new strategies.

To better understand how attorneys feel about their organizations' diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts, the Minority Corporate Counsel Association (MCCA) partnered with Russell Reynolds Associates (RRA) in 2018 to launch an Inclusion Index survey. More than 600 respondents from both law firms and corporate legal departments, and across all demographic categories responded to the survey, yielding a robust set of insights.

Our central finding: Despite longstanding efforts to create genuine diversity, attorneys who come from diverse backgrounds consistently rate their employers lower than others on key inclusion

metrics. These ratings translate into low belonging scores, meaning that many people of color feel they have to adapt their behaviors in order to succeed. They are particularly likely to feel excluded from career development opportunities, and ultimately, the possibility of promotion to top leadership levels.

THE PATH FORWARD

To make progress, leaders in the legal profession should focus their efforts on promoting inclusive leadership as well as diversity itself. More than 90 percent of those working for an inclusive leader feel they can be successful as their authentic self, compared with only 25 percent of others, according to RRA's 2018 D&I Pulse data. Inclusive leaders are also associated with more creative and higher-performing teams.

Our research shows inclusive leaders excel in four areas. They bring **awareness and clarity** to problem areas, they practice **courageous accountability** to help resolve those problems, they **empower others**, and they foster **innovative collaboration** to unlock the unique contributions of each person in a group.

<i>Intrapersonal Dimensions</i>	Inclusive Leadership Competencies	<i>Interpersonal Dimensions</i>
Reading Situations and Challenges	 Innovative Collaboration	Leveraging Differences to Win
Reflecting with Empathy	 Empowering Others	Developing with Feedback
Holding Self Accountable	 Courageous Accountability	Holding Others Accountable
Identifying Motivation, Privilege & Acumen	 Awareness & Clarity	Fostering Open Dialogue

¹ 2018 Vault/MCCA Law Firm Diversity Report, <https://www.mcca.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018-Vault-MCCA-Law-Firm-Diversity-Survey-Report.pdf>

HOW DO THESE CATEGORIES TRANSLATE INTO ACTION?

Awareness and Clarity:

Core actions associated with this competency include gathering information about D&I pain points from the organization, creating safe spaces for dialogue on differences, and proactively soliciting input from diverse viewpoints.

“[Dialogue around diversity and inclusion] won’t get comfortable without practice. They need to keep fostering situations that may be uncomfortable but are friendly and respectful and engaging.”

– Hispanic male attorney; MCCA/RRA Inclusion Index respondent

Courageous Accountability:

Core actions associated with this competency include leaders setting goals to address the D&I pain points that dialogues have surfaced and making visible personal commitments to stick with them. This process may involve creating new policies, setting new goals, or hiring new talent to oversee D&I.

“To foster an inclusive culture, the organization would need to make that a goal. There are no goals of diversity, written or voiced. Then, when the goal is made, they can make strides to hire and include people of diverse backgrounds...”

– Black female attorney; MCCA/RRA Inclusion Index respondent

Empowering Others:

Core actions include leaders taking time to understand each direct report’s strengths, weaknesses, and career goals and connecting them to resources that can help them achieve those goals. These resources can take the form of mentorship or sponsorship within the firm, or connection to external training or education.

“Leadership could actively participate more in D&I events. They do a good job of encouraging these efforts, but they don’t all participate or actually engage with the department in these events.”

– Female, in-house counsel; MCCA/RRA inclusion Index respondent

Innovative Collaboration:

With a better understanding of each team member’s potential, leaders leverage complementary strengths and styles to maximize team outcomes. Specific steps might include intentionally building diverse or cross-functional teams or adjusting meeting styles to ensure full participation.

“[It would be great to have] more encouragement of senior attorneys (particularly rainmakers and those in leadership positions) to adapt styles/communications to diverse associate pools. For example, actively soliciting input from associates who, culturally, are accustomed to “speaking only when spoken to” when it comes to interacting with authority figures.”

– Southeast Asian male, law firm; MCCA/RRA Inclusion Index respondent

Background and methodology: The MCCA/RRA Inclusion Index survey measured eight factors related to culture, including how people felt about leadership, policies, and peer interactions. It was completed by 661 respondents between May and August 2018. Responses were reported on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. Averages were calculated for each of the 8 inclusion index factors and the following human capital outcomes: Belonging, Employee Engagement, Intent to Remain, and Firm Reputation. Based on the demographic information provided by 209 respondents: 54% were female, 44% were male, 2% preferred not to share/62% identify as a person of color (Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, or Latinx)/38% identify as white, 85% identify as heterosexual, 12% identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, 3% prefer not to share./ 51% work for in-house counsel, 38% work for a law firm, 11% work for other employers.

<p>Working Across Differences</p> <p>A measurement of how an organization facilitates respectful, collaborative, and productive interactions and understanding between employees of all backgrounds</p>	<p>Leveraging of Different Perspectives</p> <p>The extent to which different viewpoints and backgrounds are welcomed and strategically leveraged within the organization to gain a competitive advantage</p>	<p>Workplace Respect</p> <p>The extent to which employees from all backgrounds experience a respectful workplace free of implicit and explicit offenses</p>
<p>Leadership Commitment</p> <p>The extent to which leadership within the organization supports and advances the efforts of diversity and inclusion</p>	 <p>Inclusion Index</p>	<p>Voice & Influence</p> <p>The extent to which employees of all backgrounds are given a voice, as well as influential representation in leadership</p>
<p>Organizational Fairness</p> <p>The extent to which organizational systems such as performance appraisal, promotions, and employee policies are applied fairly across all employees</p>	<p>Accommodating Differences</p> <p>The extent to which accommodations are made for employees when needed, and without retribution</p>	<p>Employee Recruitment, Development & Retention</p> <p>A measure of an organization's efforts to recruit, retain and develop employees from all backgrounds</p>

Key Employee Outcomes:

- **Employee Belonging**
In this organization, I can be successful as my authentic self.
- **Employee Engagement**
I am highly engaged in my job.
- **Employee Intent to Remain**
I intend on remaining with my organization for the foreseeable future.
- **Perceived Firm Reputation**
This organization has a reputation for supporting diversity and inclusion.

■ Climate ■ Leadership ■ Structure

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The preeminent voice on diversity and inclusion issues in the legal profession, MCCA is committed to advancing the hiring, retention and promotion of diverse lawyers in law departments and law firms by providing research, best practices, professional development and training, and pipeline initiatives. MCCA's groundbreaking research and innovative training and professional development programs highlight best practices and identify the most significant diversity and inclusion challenges facing the legal community. MCCA takes an inclusive approach to the definition of "diversity" including race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status and generational differences. Since MCCA's founding 20 years ago, it has been recognized and honored by the Association of Corporate Counsel, the National LGBT Bar Association, the National Minority Business Council, Inc. and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, among others. MCCA's vision, "To make the next generation of legal leaders as diverse as the world we live in," is what drives the organization and our passionate and committed partners.

For more information, visit www.mcca.com.

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COVID-19

Covid-19: What makes a good leader during a crisis?



By David Robson  27th March 2020

A leader's response to a crisis is much more than speeches. Yet the messaging may play a key role in obtaining the public's trust and co-operation.

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here is a popular English proverb that says “cometh the hour, cometh the man” – the idea that the right leaders will come to the fore during times of crisis. Today, it’s indelibly linked to Winston Churchill and his leadership during World War II.

For many leaders across the world, “the hour” has now come again, with the Covid-19 outbreak **threatening millions of lives across the globe** unless swift, concerted action is taken.

There is no easy route through the crisis. Besides the obvious problem of selecting the correct path to take, leaders also face the monumental task of reassuring the public and persuading them to follow through on government decisions – even when measures such as social distancing – with its knock-on effect on employment – come at great personal cost.

A wrong move could erode trust and unleash unrest that exacerbates the existing dangers. But it remains to be seen whether our leaders will rise to the occasion with the appropriate response.

Political scientist Arjen Boin, at Leiden University in the Netherlands, has studied the most successful and unsuccessful responses during previous emergencies, and he has co-authored a book, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, that can help us to understand our leaders’ messages during the current emergency.



New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's swift reaction to the Christchurch shootings illustrates a leader who meets Arjen Boin's communication criteria. (Credit: Getty Images)

There is, of course, much more to a leader's responses than his or her speeches. In his research into crises like the 9/11 attacks on the US and Hurricane Katrina, Boin has identified many of the steps necessary for an effective response. Leaders should, for instance, offer a rapid recognition of the danger and, ideally, the necessary infrastructure and procedures should already be in place to quickly gather data once the crisis has hit (the so-called "sense making").

When it comes to taking action, the leader needs to judge exactly how much they can rely on individual co-operation through persuasion, and when they need to cross over into more rigid "command and control" (a choice that can quickly backfire if it not taken with suitable caution). All of this will determine how you limit the damage of an emergency.

Yet it is often the contents of the leader's messaging that may ultimately determine the public's trust, Boin has found. "Effective crisis leadership cannot be brought about by simply doing the right thing' on the ground," he writes. Instead, the leaders need to craft a good narrative that helps clarify the problem and unite the population if they are to attain the "permissive consensus" that is essential to be able to make decisions and formulate policies, he says.

Don't sugar-coat

Boin points to many pitfalls that leaders must avoid if they are to create trust rather than dissent.

While it is commonly believed that the public will panic in times of emergency, there is little empirical evidence to back this up

One common mistake, for instance, is to create a message that lacks consistency: discrepancies that will soon be reported in the media. Conflicting messages – **such as**

the UK government's initial statements over its aim to build "herd immunity" – can simply add to the feelings of confusion and distrust, says Boin.

There is also the tendency to sugar-coat the situation. Although it is commonly believed that the public will panic in times of emergency, there is little empirical evidence to back this up, he argues. "The chance people will panic, due to what the government is telling them, is very low," he says. (He doesn't count **'panic buying'** as an example of this, since most citizens were rationally responding to possibility of the lockdown.)

For this reason, leaders should be open about the evolving nature of the problem, avoiding a "paternalistic sense of children that need to be shielded from bad news" and instead treat the public "as adults that are going to make a long-term effort", says Boin. "You want to level with the people – to project the uncertainty that exists."

Without that openness, the public can quickly sense deception, reducing the credibility of the government and trust in their policies.



South Korean President Moon Jae-in communicated coronavirus information early and consistently to inspire a "wartime sense of purpose" within the public. (Credit: Getty Images)

As a past example, Boin and his co-authors point to the **UK's 'Mad Cow' crisis** more than two decades ago, after it became clear that eating beef with BSE could lead to Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease, a form of neurodegeneration. One of the agriculture ministers tried to increase morale by eating a burger in front of TV cameras; his successor declared that the "British beef has never been safer" – even though potentially contaminated meat was still in circulation. Neither message washed with the public and together they only added to its distrust of the government's response.

Overall, Boin and his colleagues argue that the initial message should be delivered quickly, to avoid other contrasting narratives "filling the vacuum", and with five aims. "It offers a credible explanation of what happened, it offers guidance, it instils hope, shows empathy and suggests that leaders are in control." If you fail on any one of those, you will begin to lose the public's confidence.

Sense of purpose

In recent history, the New Zealand Prime Minister **Jacinda Ardern's swift and heartfelt reaction to the Christchurch shootings may illustrate a leader who met these five goals**. Her message showed compassion for the victims, clarified the hate-filled ideology that had caused the shootings while reaffirming New Zealand's values as an open and tolerant country, and underlined the additional security measures to prevent further tragedy without underplaying the future risk. She went on to change the country's gun laws and received widespread acclaim across the globe for her efforts.

Regarding the coronavirus, **South Korea's rapid response** may be an exemplary demonstration of the principles of effective crisis management. The country had apparently started to stockpile coronavirus testing kits long before **an outbreak had occurred on its own shores**, allowing testing of 10,000 people a day when the infection rate started to climb, and a mobile app kept citizens constantly updated with the evolving situation. In Boin's terms, the nation had already established the infrastructure for "sense making" of the situation. (This was partly the result of the previous **MERS outbreak**, which had already established some of the infrastructure necessary for a quick response to future outbreaks.)

Some of South Korea's success must also be down to President Moon Jae-in's messaging, which was clear and consistent along the lines that Boin's work suggests. The public were primed, from the very beginning, to see the outbreak as a national emergency, with regular television broadcasts and subway announcements reminding citizens of the danger. According to an article by the New York Times' bureau chief in Seoul, this built on an already high level of public trust to create a "**wartime sense of purpose**".

Many leaders don't appreciate how important messaging can be during times of crisis, particularly regarding consistency and openness

Some **Western leaders, in contrast, may have been too optimistic in their initial attitudes to the outbreak**, thus eroding the public's trust in their capacity to contain disaster.

Despite modern politics' well-known focus on press relations, Boin suspects that, in the heat of the moment, many leaders still don't appreciate just how important the messaging can be during times of crisis, particularly regarding consistency and openness. "I think that leaders sometimes underestimate the effect of their own words, especially the [effects of] things they *don't* say as well as the things they *do* say," he says.

Ira Helsloot, of the **Crisislab** at Radboud University in The Netherlands, agrees that the content of the **political message can often be more important than the actual decision making** – at least as far as public approval and trust go.

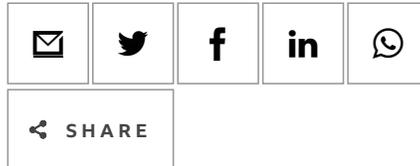
In his opinion, this involves appealing to collective values and a collective history, emphasising society at large rather than individual self-interest. He cites New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani's handling of the 9/11 attacks as a prime example of excellent crisis management in the past. Giuliani appealed to New Yorkers' collective pride, for example, by repeatedly asking them to set an example for the rest of the US – and the result of his memorable and continued efforts to acknowledge their grief *and* raise morale were met with widespread approval that continued long after the event.

Like Boin, Helsloot argues that acknowledging the uncertainty will only improve your

positive messages if the leader is not transparent about the negative part,” he says.

“People want the leader to project compassion and an understanding of how the situation is for those concerned, and to project the hope that together we can manage the crisis, even though we don’t know everything about the present situation.” He concedes it is a “rather difficult balancing act for our leaders,” but if they can achieve it, the public will feel seen and heard. He says that’s what we need right now.

David Robson is the author of [The Intelligence Trap](#), which explores the most common reasoning errors and cutting-edge strategies to improve decision making. He is [@d_a_robson](#) on Twitter.



COVID-19

Life after lockdown: How China went back to work



By Lu-Hai Liang 30th April 2020

Much of the global population remains socially isolated to prevent the spread of Covid-19. But after months of lockdown in China, people are returning to work. So what does life look like?

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