

The Adaptive Leader in a VUCA Environment

Pre and post the COVID-19 Pandemic

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In a VUCA, (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) Environment adaptable leaders are required more now than ever, especially leaders who have the ability to pivot and respond to an ever-changing landscape in which they are operating including, new circumstances and updating their knowledge and skills to meet these new demands. Adaptive leadership emphasizes learning and to be in a position to ask better questions, listen more astutely, maintain a flexible mindset, build stronger relationships, and further develop a sense of authenticity and humility.

In a recent study that EMA Partners International conducted on Leadership Styles, where more than 400 leaders of global and local companies from 5 continents participated, we asked the following question:

“What are the top five competencies that your organization's senior management team should develop to better navigate people and business post Covid-19?”, the top answers were:

1. **Strategic Thinking**
2. **Involvement & People Leadership**
3. **Innovation**
4. **Management of Ambiguity**
5. **Generate Confidence and Positive Attitudes**

More emphasis should be placed on an authentic leadership style, and a relatable honest leader who involves and leads people by example. The leader should be able to generate a culture of innovation by listening to their team and being open to learning and becoming more adaptable.

The adaptable leader in a professional environment will become a leader that is sensitive to the work life balance of their team during these times along with; showing confidence, a positive attitude and trust. The leader who connects with their team will be able to synchronize and navigate the ambiguity in an agile way to achieve objectives efficiently but without neglecting the team during the process.



During our research, there was a focus on actions taken in the middle of the pandemic, participants were leaders of global and local companies from 5 continents, we asked them the following question: “How efficient has remote working been for your organization?”, we verified that many leaders found that the remote working landscape was providing good results, and most of the leaders that participated from different business sectors in various parts of the world felt that it had proven just as efficient as work that was typically done in an office environment.

Effective communication from a leader helps to break down the barriers of not having face to face meetings, conveying this leadership style will give them a better and more relatable presence, for example, a leader can conduct a meeting with 200 people in different countries, and at different times.

The agile leader will embrace and encourage remote training tools so that more people can be reached and allows their teams to be more agile and receptive to technology. This will also allow for National collaboration and information sharing, and will support global investment on employee training programs, and the integration of global career development for their teams on various projects and assignments.

Our research has also identified that organizational culture will likely change in most companies. It will be an adaptive approach with an enhanced focus on the employee's need to increase virtual engagement. Virtual team meetings will be an excellent opportunity to socialize and share project status and develop strategies, planning and execution.

Authentic leaders should inspire openness to real life situations of their team members (transforming vulnerability into authenticity), and during calls seek to connect with their environment and not just with the person. In today's environment, virtual leadership is about connecting with the daily lives of team members to inspire authentic connectivity between the person and the company. The style of work in the virtual environment will change, it will be a formal style, but also casual, relatable and adaptable.

Watching an executive lead a meeting while they prepare breakfast for their children is an example of an approach that would promote authenticity.



Narrating what happens around them in their family environment, while they ask questions and make decisions regarding projects, fosters an environment of inclusivity and work life balance.

Depending on the openness to change, the adoption of new practices can be approached as an opportunity for further development and an opportunity to strengthen teams to inspire loyalty by being the example and an understanding that each person in the company is a leader in one way or another. To be a change agent, you need to commit to your team, define a purpose and solidify a community atmosphere.

Businesses should encourage and recognize all levels of leadership with an emphasis on trans-generational leadership. From the practitioner, to a manager, everyone should strengthen their leadership competencies across the organization to develop a culture of inclusive leadership and shared accountability which will result in strengthened commitment and performance. This acknowledgement can be done through virtual calls or periodical team meetings and could possibly be organized and lead by the Company CEO, the goal is to recognize and keep in communication with everyone.

Fostering a culture of shared appreciation and inclusion inspires us to give our best during times of uncertainty and change and keeps us connected and informed.

Author



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María Isabel Luna Kanematsu is a Managing Partner. She has experience working across industries and functional area including, Bruno Ferrini-Clarks Groups & Florsheim, Textile ALV, Citibank and Profuturo AFP. She is also a part-time faculty member for Human Resources Management, Training and Development, and Human Resources Processes at the University of Lima.

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María has also studied extensively in the areas of Human Resources, Process & Product Development & Logistics.



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Since 1988, EMA Partners has been serving local and international businesses across multiple industry sectors. The firm has been instrumental in helping its clients recruit numerous leaders who have made a significant impact in their organizations.

With access to intellectual property through our association with Decision Dynamics AB, EMA Partners is a provider of leadership assessments and other advisory services to our clients.

Our expertise lies in assessing, hiring and developing leaders at the Board, C-Suite and Senior Executive level across industries. Our clients include global corporations, local companies and not for profit organizations.



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