

5 THINGS LEADERS NEED TO DO IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD



* By Deborah Ancona

The world is changing, and leaders need to adapt. Whether the disruption is due to pandemic, climate change, or economic crisis, they need to evolve their leadership behaviors to survive. How do they evolve? Here are five things they need to do to lead in this new world.

1. CLARIFY THEIR LEADERSHIP SIGNATURE

In times of uncertainty, people need leaders to articulate their leadership signature. This is a leader's own unique way of leading. People are nervous and want to know who is working to solve the significant problems of the moment. If the leader is a numbers person, then people need to know to approach them with numbers. If the leader supports a collective approach, then everyone should step up with new solutions and approaches. Understanding a leader's style puts everyone at ease and improves communication during times of uncertainty.

2. CONDUCT SENSEMAKING

With change happening at such a fast pace, leaders cannot rely on what they knew yesterday to lead tomorrow. They have to carry out "sensemaking" with their team to determine what is going on now. What is different? Who do they need to talk to for information? How have customer expectations shifted? How have resources changed? What are the biggest priorities? Before they jump to act, leaders and their teams must understand what is different, identify patterns and trends, and test whether their "maps" are correct. Sensemaking is the springboard for more effective action.

3. CREATE FLEXIBLE TEAMS

Leaders need to create externally-oriented teams – also called "xTEAMS" – that are interconnected to understand the external world. These teams can create new forms of partnership by adopting flexible membership and reaching out across boundaries into

the larger ecosystem to come up with new solutions. A good example is the current collaboration between Takeda, Novartis, regulators, universities, and other experts to find a treatment for COVID-19. This would not have been likely in a pre-COVID world. However, they conducted sensemaking and saw a different environment that required new ways of working together through interconnected teams.

4. FOCUS ON THE CHALLENGES

This is not the time for ego-driven leadership or political agendas—"follow me because I am great". Instead, leaders need to focus on motivating people to work together to address the big challenges of the moment. The International Development Bank is doing this by looking at creative ways to meet the needs of the countries it serves. The focus is on action and moving ahead to find new solutions to new problems.

5. ARCHITECT NIMBLE ORGANIZATIONS

To make these steps happen, leaders must ensure that the necessary structures/culture are in place. They must move from punishing mistakes to valuing entrepreneurial leaders at all levels. They must shift from supporting order-giving to enabling others to think outside of the box, collaborate, and develop. These architecting leaders also need to communicate simple rules, providing guidance and resources to move in new directions.

By following these steps, leaders will create teams and organizations that together form a system that can adapt to this rapidly changing world. **LT**

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