

Flexi-leadership

one leadership style does not fit all

” The key was building self-awareness to enable me to select the style that most appropriately matched circumstances.

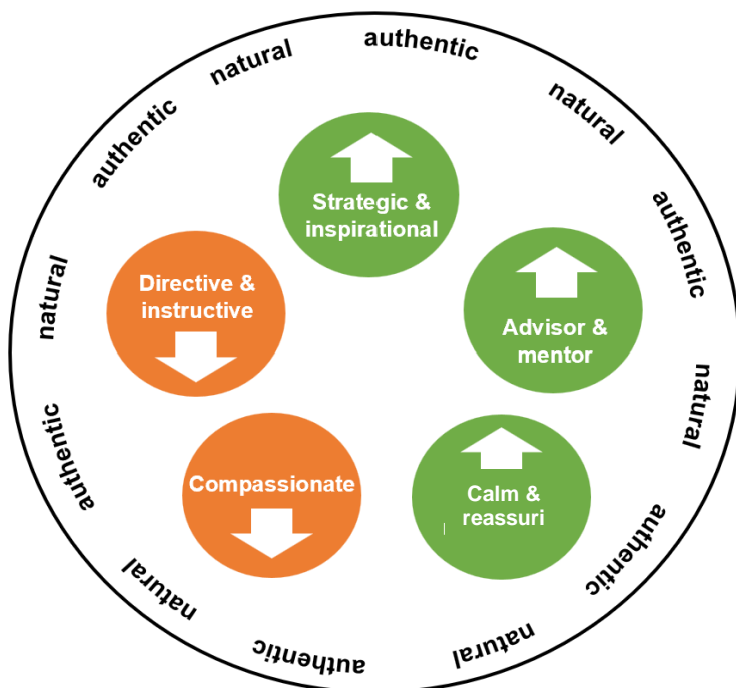


Traditional leadership Models suggest that great leaders adopt a particular set of characteristics, such as compassion, honesty and courage. More recently, academics have argued the benefits of a distributed leadership style, sharing responsibility, rather than hierarchical control.

However, if I were 35,000 ft above sea level in an aircraft on fire, I would not expect the Captain to have a collaborative discussion with a wide group of stakeholders to determine responsibilities and next steps. I would expect the Captain to make autocratic and immediate decisions, perhaps in consultation with the First Officer at most.

No single leadership style or set of characteristics are correct or better than another. It depends on circumstances. David Clutterbuck's High Performing Team theory tells us that great leaders do what their particular teams need to perform at their best, taking into account the environment and system in which they operate.

As recent years have corroborated, our world is more VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complex, Ambiguity) than ever. What may be an effective leadership approach on Monday morning may not be effective by Monday afternoon.



Michael, the leader of a team I worked with, describes his version of a flexible approach.

”

I used to be proud of my ability to apply a consistent, authentic leadership style in all situations. One of the most powerful realisations was that I actually had five leadership styles. The key was building self-awareness to enable me to select the style that most appropriately matched circumstances.

The diagram illustrates my styles; arrows indicate areas I was trying to use more, and areas I was trying to play down. Note the downward arrow next to compassion is not a misprint. Sometimes I was too compassionate and did not hold others to account enough.

It is also extremely important that I remain authentic and natural through everything I do, also depicted in the diagram.

This model we created worked and still works well for me – it was custom-built, completely genuine and authentic. My model will not be found in any leadership textbook and is a great example of the power of leadership and team coaching.

Our thinking was not based on any particular bespoke leadership philosophy I was aware of at the time, or the logical argument around flexibility I present above. Rather, it emerged from conversations we were having one-to-one and with his team.

In the context of the team, as psychological safety grew, team members were able to openly share what they appreciated about Michael's style, and confidently articulate what would help them perform even better. Michael took on board what he was hearing, reflected and processed what it meant for him, and the flexi-model was born.

More recently, work has been published formalising the flex-approach. Most notably in *Real Time Leadership* (Nobel & Kauffman, 2023), the authors argue that, "The best leaders know how to read the situation and respond in the most effective way possible."

In our VUCA world, successful leaders cannot focus on particular leadership skills (such as compassion, honesty and courage) or become adept at managing distributed leadership models. Building environmental-awareness and self-awareness are higher priorities, enabling flexi-leadership to meet the needs of particular circumstances, teams and organisations. While distributed leadership might be appropriate when selecting aircraft livery, it could be a deadly choice if the aircraft is on fire.

If you would like to know more about Michael, his team and their experiences of flexi-leadership and team coaching, see *Team coaching for organisational development: team, leader, organisation, coach and supervision perspectives*, by Helen Zink, Routledge 2023.

© Helen Zink, 2023



Biography

Helen Zink is a growth coach, leadership coach and team coach, with significant hands-on business and leadership experience at a senior level. Helen draws from a large toolkit, including coaching, team coaching, applied positive psychology, change management and other strategic tools and methodologies. She holds many qualifications and certifications, including Senior Practitioner Team and Individual Coach with EMCC, Advanced Certification in Team Coaching and Professional Certified Coach with ICF, MSc (Coaching Psychology), MBA, BMS (hons), and others. Helen published *Team coaching for organisational development: team, leader, organisation, coach and supervision perspectives* in 2023.

Helen zink

+64 21555456

helen@growtobe.co.nz

www.growtobe.co.nz

www.linkedin.com/in/helen-zink

Buy now \$



SCAN ME

TEAM COACHING FOR ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
TEAM, LEADER, ORGANISATION, COACH AND SUPERVISION PERSPECTIVES

HELEN ZINK
with guest authors TAMMY TURNER
and the TEAM LEADER
Foreword by David Clutterbuck

