

# LEADERSHIP STYLES

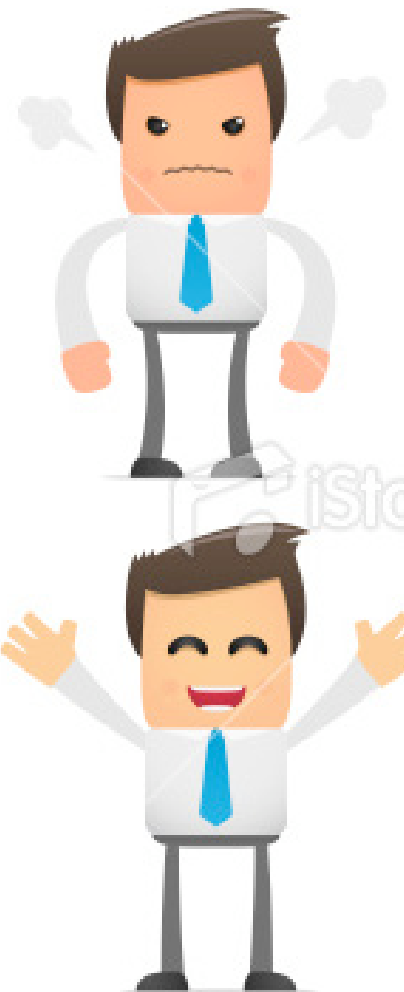
## ...how to deal

Internal communicators cannot choose the leaders they work with, or the generic leadership style that most naturally fits their needs. The wrong message at the wrong time can be catastrophic for both workforce morale and the respect in which the organization is held; even the right message delivered by the wrong person through an unsuitable channel can be damaging. There are various examples of different styles of leader that communicators may be confronted with [see box, page 35], but practitioners may have to cope with a combination of different traits ranging from authoritarian, command-and-control figures through to more consensus-based, permissive characters.

Richard Derwent Cooke, managing director of the I-Change consultancy and who has experience of working with senior executives at various multinational corporations, says that leaders can be loosely broken down into the two types outlined above, albeit with differences along this wide spectrum. “You broadly have those who lead from the front – the ‘do-as-I say, I’m-the-boss’ type – and then the middle-of-the-pack leader who says: ‘It seems to me that this is what we should be doing, what do you think?’” he says.

An increasingly globalized workforce where employees have higher expectations of leaders and look for meaning, reward and recognition for their efforts is also having an impact on style of leadership, says Marcus Hayes, director of planning at UK consultancy The Storytellers.

“Leaders see the increasing need to foster a culture of collaboration, involvement, dialogue and consultation internally to build loyalty, trust and teamwork, retain talent and enable their businesses to become truly customer-centric and gain competitive advantage,” he says. “Leadership styles have moved from command and control to engage and empower. Great leaders must now be able to communicate, engage and motivate their teams, as well as develop talent and groom future leaders.”



Any internal communicator will testify to the importance of a company’s senior leadership when it comes to informing and motivating staff. Different styles suit different situations and good communicators adapt to different leaders and support them, as well as having the confidence to confront them. **NICK MARTINDALE** finds out more.

# with the different types

## Challenges of different styles

One of the challenges for internal communicators in dealing with different styles of leaders is to work out the most effective ways to make the most of their characteristics – as well as what to avoid. Bill Quirke, managing director of international specialists Synopsis Communication Consulting and expert speaker at Melcrum events, recalls one case where a highly introverted former finance director was promoted to replace a charismatic, extrovert leader; requiring

a complete change of tack for the internal communication team.

“The issue with him was not to put him up on the stage,” he says. “He was very good at breakfast briefings, lunch meetings and engaging with people. A lot of leadership and communication focuses on the charismatic leader but they’re in the absolute minority. We should be looking at what kind of leader they are and how to play to their strengths. So you could have someone who is an ‘empathizer’ doing phone-ins or online web chats with them answering questions. Where communicators succeed is where the leaders do it right and are willing to try something a bit more adventurous next time.”

Lee Smith, director of UK-based internal communication consultancy Gatehouse, urges communicators to be aware of the different styles of leadership that exist and adapt accordingly. “The visionary leader will be clear about what they want to say to the troops and would be brilliant at doing a monthly webcast to their management team,” he suggests.

“With the more consensus style, you’d maybe look at going back to the floor. Once you start to understand where your leader is coming from and what style they are, it has a lot of implications for the tactics you use.”

The classic authoritarian type of leader can often cause communicators headaches, he says; not least because this style of leadership does not lend itself to bottom-up communication. “It might be important to beef up your listening channels so people can question what that CEO is saying without feeling that they will get punished,” Smith says.

A more consensus style can also create issues, though, as the person who is delegating, inclusive and involving is potentially demonstrating their incompleteness, which might not be to the taste of everyone in an organization.

Should company politics allow, communicators can also subtly pick and choose different members of the leadership team for certain roles, depending on the intricacies of the



## KEY POINTS

- ▶ The styles of leadership communicators can encounter are greatly varied and may contain a combination of both authoritarian and permissive traits. The increased globalization of business is also affecting leadership styles.
- ▶ One of the challenges for internal communicators in dealing with different styles of leaders is to determine the most effective ways to use their strengths and avoid their weaknesses. Communicators also have a role to play in coaching them to alter their instinctive habits for specific audiences.
- ▶ Communicating across a global workforce, with sensitivity for local cultural norms, can pose challenges for leaders; communicators have a pivotal role in helping them here too.
- ▶ Different styles of leadership also mean internal communicators must adapt their own approach to get buy in to their suggestions.

- ◀ individual situation. There may be some leaders who people respond to better than others and a savvy communication team will use those leaders in their strategy more than they would others.

### Coaching leaders

Yet while communicators need to be aware of the most natural and effective settings for leadership styles, they also have a role to play in coaching them to alter their instinctive habits for specific audiences. “If a visionary leader talks to a room full of engineers they will think ‘OK, but where is the substance?’” says Quirke. “But if it’s a room full of marketers, they will think it’s fabulous. The person who is going to connect the leader to the audience is the communicator.”

He advocates training leaders in the FAME – focus, articulate, model and engage – framework as a means of outlining their broad vision and specific plans to an audience. “Most leaders are naturally good at two of those and you’re trying to coach them to be good at the other two,” he says. “As a communicator you need to look at what they’re already good at and how you build on those strengths.”

Klavs Valskov, director of communication, Maersk Line, has been working closely with senior leaders to improve their presentation skills in a highly personalized approach. “Confidence levels are quite high so it’s very rare that people are scared to get on stage, but the quality is not always fantastic,” he says.

“I’ve found that when you reach a certain level in an organization, it’s not so good to put leaders together when you train them up. You need to train them one-on-one to really get an impact so I’ve tailored a small program of two hours, where it’s very intense and we tend to bring in an external coach. Sometimes I even leave the room to build that kind of intimacy between the leader and the coach because it’s super-personal. For example, if someone asks: ‘Why do you do that with your hands?’, especially with senior leaders, you have to be careful how you go about it,” he says.

Visionary leaders, in particular, are likely to excel at outlining their broad plan but will require specific help in the detail and the day-to-day

conversations, such as those required to obtain line managers buy-in for their approach.

### Cultural sensitivities

Communicating across a global workforce can also pose challenges for leaders, and communicators have a pivotal role in helping them navigate these potentially choppy waters. “A good communicator needs to find a style that is both authentic to them as a leader and will resonate with their audience,” says Hayes. “This requires sensitivity to the cultural norms of the region they are communicating within. For example, a leader whose natural style is to create a burning bridge as a platform for change needs to recognize that in Japan people tend to see criticism as personal. On the other hand, a leader whose natural style is to be visionary needs to recognize that in Germany people tend to be suspicious of hyperbole.

Anisu K Verghese, internal communication lead (India), Sapient Corporation, agrees that leaders need to be prescient of global differences: “By respecting cultural nuances like hierarchy in regions such as India and the differences in mind-sets, leaders will be viewed as sensitive and concerned individuals. They can build credibility if they appreciate hierarchy but are also flexible enough to see it is as a structure for better governance. Encouraging communities and participating in local festivals and important religious events also helps to create a bridge between leaders and people.”

“Skilled communicators can play an essential part in helping leaders to create a narrative that bridges this tension between authenticity and resonance,” Hayes adds. “Large global organizations need a network of communicators embedded within their regions who can provide local insight into how these messages will land, ahead of them being delivered.”

This is something that has particular resonance for Valskov at Maersk Line, where the company’s 130 countries are divided into 50 clusters. “When we build a package to roll out, a lot of thought goes into it,” he says. “If we’re promoting something will it be as acceptable in Asia as in the US, or are we going to offend someone? When you start doing things like pictures and videos it becomes very tricky because you need to be very diverse in your selections.

“In each cluster we have a local communication manager so we explain what we want to do, put everything on to a portal where they can download the material and let them use what they want because they know what works best in their local organization,” he adds. “I have no chance of knowing what works best in 50 different places.”



As a communicator you need to look at what leaders are already good at, and build on those strengths

### Adapting your style

Yet the different styles of leadership also mean internal communicators must adapt their own approach to those individuals to get them to buy in to their suggestions. “If you have a lead-from-the-front leader, you probably have to convince them that the change you wish them to make or the message you wish them to send is their idea,” says Derwent Cooke.

“You have to take them offline and have a conversation away from the public gaze so you can let them come at this at their own pace in a way that they’re not going to resist. It’s not manipulation but it’s about not causing false resistance, which stops people from hearing the value of what you’re proposing.”

Leaders who take a more consensus-based approach can cause more problems for communicators than the more authoritarian ones, he says. “They say they know what they need to do but don’t have the confidence, or belief, that allows them to tell their team, so they go and chat about it for another three months,” he says. “The more ‘gung ho’ leaders get more done. They make more mistakes, but because they cycle through them faster they might have a better impact on the business.”

Often the best way to approach a leader is to match their own style, suggests Quirke. “If I see a leader who is very direct I will say: ‘Right, I understand there are three things you want to get out of this,’” he says. “I’m trying to work out how to engage with that person so they can see I’m on their side.” Understanding how you are likely to react when you come up against a certain type of leader is also important here, he adds.

### Thinking strategically

In all this, though, there is a challenge for internal communicators to start to act – and think – more strategically, as well as having the confidence to steer leaders of different styles in the right direction. “Communicators need to say that they are the experts in this area and that they understand change, engagement, the roles of leaders and how to help them fulfil those roles,” says Quirke. “If you’re looking to move up to be a strategic business partner and trusted advisor, this is your big chance.”

At Maersk Line, Valskov admits that some local communicators may be intimidated by the prospect of approaching senior leaders to advise on their communication style. “One of the tasks they do less of locally is to organize senior leader meetings and coordinate employee engagement activities,” he says.

## SIX EMOTIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLES

The following six styles of leadership have different effects on the emotions of a target audience:

**Visionary:** Outlines where the company needs to go and openly shares information, but can be weak on details and falls down with experienced staff. Works well when a new direction is needed.

**Coaching:** Connects individual needs with organizational goals and can generate high levels of loyalty but risks coming across as micro-managing. Best suited where individuals need to develop long-term skills.

**Affiliative:** Highly collaborative style that is good for organizational harmony but there is a tendency to avoid negative feedback. Best used in stressful situations and to heal rifts.

**Democratic:** Encourages participation with both good and bad news but risks a lack of effective action. Best used when buy-in is required or when the company is unsure of the best course of action.

**Pace-setting:** Sets goals for people and expects excellence, but low on guidance and can lack emotional intelligence. Best suited for a motivated and competent team.

**Commanding:** Soothes fears and gives clear directions but can seem cold and distant. They work well at times of crisis.

**Source:** Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership*, HBS Press, 2004 (published in the UK as *The New Leaders*).

“The dream scenario is that you have a network of communication professionals, which can go in and challenge the leader and say: ‘You haven’t done a column for three weeks’ or ‘We did a quick survey round the office and people are frustrated about these three elements so it’s a good time for you to stand up and answer some questions’. That doesn’t really happen but it’s something I would dream of doing a lot more.”

One way of going about this is to paint a picture of a successful outcome rather than focusing in on perceived weaknesses, suggests Hayes. “Internal communicators can often remain in relatively junior positions and it would be daunting for those levels to challenge leaders around their communication,” he says. “One of the ways to make a convincing argument is by using real life examples, so find those stories that set out a relevant business scenario and how the communication approach or a certain leadership style was key to overcoming a challenge or achieving a successful outcome.”

There are lasting benefits for communicators professionally when you understand a leader’s style and can challenge them, it means that you have influence and that internal communication will run that much smoother. It also means communication is an important component of supporting leadership in achieving business goals. **SCM**