

# The Six Leadership Styles in Turbulent Times



**“Anyone can take the helm when the sea is calm.” - Publilius Syrus**

Investment analysts talk about “black swan events,” which are significant events that occur roughly once per decade and have major global impact. Examples include: natural disasters, trade disputes, wars, acts of terrorism, the global financial sector meltdown, and of course global pandemics (six since 2000).

The year 2020 will undoubtedly be remembered as the year of the Covid-19 global pandemic which brought large scale upheaval to personal health, workplaces, industries, countries, and entire economies. Also, throw in the amount of “typical” change that organizations experience (mergers, restructuring, new systems, leadership changes, process improvements, etc.) and leadership at every level gets truly ‘tested’ on a very regular basis. We also know that when tested, many leaders rise to the occasion and shine, while other leaders run for cover and disappear. During black swan events, people are pushed down to the bottom of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (food, clothing, shelter), and it is particularly important for leaders to lead from the front, be present, visible, and double-down on action and communication.

This article explores the Six Leadership Styles, and how they each add value in turbulent times, while also providing a cautionary tale for each one.

## The Six Leadership Styles: Overview

Joint research by Harvard University and Korn Ferry, titled ‘*Leadership That Gets Results*’ (Goleman, 2000) originally identified the Six Leadership Styles and empirically showed that the style of a leader accounts for 70% of the variance in the climate the leader creates (what it feels like to work here). The climate, in turn, accounts for 30% of the variance in results the team achieves. Clearly, the leader sets the tone. A brief definition of each of the 6 Leadership Styles is shown below:

<b>Directive</b>  “Do what I tell you to do”	<b>Visionary</b>  “Let me tell you where we’re going”	<b>Affiliative</b>  “Leadership through relationship”	<b>Participative</b>  “Let’s decide together”	<b>Pacesetting</b>  “Do what I do”	<b>Coaching</b>  “Long term development of others”
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## Leadership Styles in Turbulent Times: Strengths & Cautions

Leadership Style	Strengths of this Style In Turbulent Times	Caution With This Style In Turbulent Times
<b>Directive</b>	Takes charge, provides decisive action and clarity, prioritizes, and is comfortable saying no. People need clear direction, particularly in turbulent times. Ensures compliance and indicates consequences for non-compliance. Takes accountability and responsibility seriously. Focus is on who-does-what-by-when.	Don't make decisions in isolation. Be sure you are including input from others. Put your ego aside and listen. Don't ignore advice and get tunnel vision. It doesn't have to be 'your way' on everything. Also, a lack of directive leaves people feeling adrift.
<b>Visionary</b>	Keeps people focused on the big picture. Focus is on where and why. Very important style to use in turbulent times. The leader needs to be the tireless communicator of key messages. Inspirational, keeps people connected and aligned, translates strategy into action.	Can sometimes talk at the 90,000 foot level and therefore talk right over people's heads. Can be short on immediate and specific direction. Ensure you translate to people what-this-means-for-them. Also, a lack of visionary leaves people confused and demoralized.
<b>Affiliative</b>	Pro-actively manages the, 'relationship bank account with stakeholders,' so when turbulent times come, there's a healthy balance in the relationship account. Builds trust. Puts people and teams at the forefront. Ensures people are valued, supported, and appreciated.	Can try too hard to be liked and popular, thereby appearing to be indecisive or flip-flopping. What's popular isn't always what's right and what's right isn't always what's popular. May just cheerlead. A lack of affiliative relays the message that people don't matter.
<b>Participative</b>	Invites stakeholders into the decision-making process. Builds significant buy-in to plans by inviting multiple stakeholders to provide early input into the creation of the plan and decisions. People support what they help create.	Can get bogged down by feeling they need input from everyone or complete consensus before moving forward. Don't get stuck. Ensure stakeholders have the best interests of the initiative at heart. A lack of participative results in less buy-in.
<b>Pacesetting</b>	Is fast moving and has high standards. High energy. Is present, visible, and thrives in real-time crisis situations. Very willing to log hours and get their hands dirty. Very willing to grab an oar and row the boat alongside the team. It would never be said that they are 'above' doing work.	Can appear frantic, instill panic, and lack priorities so it can feel like...squirrel...squirrel...squirrel. Everything is urgent, important, must be done right now, and its never good enough. Don't burnout yourself or others. Remember your job is to <i>steer</i> the boat, not just row the boat. A lack of pacesetting signals an absence of urgency and standards.
<b>Coaching</b>	Makes the time to be available to give advice, feedback, and coaching to people to help them. Gives balanced actual feedback, doesn't just cheerlead. Focused on the individual's growth as	Can sub-optimize productivity by having everyone on a learning curve. Sometimes you just need to put your best person on the task and get-it-done. A lack of coaching leaves people feeling



much as the task at hand.

abandoned.

### Conclusion: 5 Things to Know + 1 Bonus Thing

1. Self-awareness is the leadership superfood. Most leaders *think* they use 4-5 of the six leadership styles but most leaders *actually* use 1. A 1-trick pony just doesn't cut it.
2. World-class leaders have developed comfort with 4+ leadership styles (19% of leaders globally).
3. You need them all. The more leadership styles you have command over, the more people and situations you can manage effectively – doubly true in turbulent times!
4. Leadership style drives 70% of climate, & climate drives 30% of results. The leader sets the tone!
5. Fact: The single biggest driver of culture is leadership behaviour.

**Bonus Information:** The top 10 leadership competencies most critical to draw upon when leading in turbulent times are, in rank order: (1) Action Oriented, (2) Manages Ambiguity & Complexity, (3) Courage, (4) Being Resilient, (5) Decision Quality, (6) Instills Trust, (7) Plans and Aligns, (8) Builds Networks, (9) Ensures Accountability, (10) Drives Vision and Purpose (Korn Ferry Institute, 2020)

What's the mix of leadership styles among your leaders? Is it helping or hindering performance? Is it building the culture you want? Leaders can understand the mix of leadership styles they typically draw upon by completing a 180° degree feedback tool that provides a foundation for self-awareness, coaching, development planning, and a deeper understanding of the leadership culture you are driving.

### Contact

Brent Pederson is a Senior Client Partner with Korn Ferry, a global management consulting firm. He has worked in 8 countries and specializes in leadership development, coaching, assessments, succession, and performance management. When he's not working with clients, he regularly presents at conferences and publishes articles. At times you might even find him mountain biking or wood working. Brent can be reached at 1.306.359.0181, email at [brent.pederson@kornferry.com](mailto:brent.pederson@kornferry.com), or on LinkedIn.