

# Study finds managers need to adjust their 'leadership style' during a crisis

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New Curtin University-led research has found bosses need to adjust their "leadership style" when dealing with a crisis to ensure their employees feel challenged, motivated and valued in the workplace.

The research, published in the *Journal of Business and Psychology*, examined more than 700 Canadian employees in [high-tech](#), manufacturing and government organizations over an 18-month period to better understand how leaders and managers influenced their employee's motivation and behavior in the workplace.

Lead author Professor Marylene Gagne, from the Future of Work Institute at Curtin University, said one style of [leadership](#) did not work for all circumstances and leaders needed to embrace different styles of leadership to ensure maximum impact, especially when an organization was facing a crisis.

"Out of the six organizations that we examined, half experienced a crisis, including financial downturns, industrial relations conflicts, and the culling of major initiatives, while the other half did not experience any crises," Professor Gagne said.

"In the organizations that did not experience a crisis, leaders who adopted a transformational style, which means acting as an enthusiastic role model, articulating an inspiring vision that challenges and provides meaningful work to employees, encouraging innovative ideas, paying attention to individual needs, and providing [positive feedback](#), had the highest improvements in employee motivation.

"Leaders who engage in this style of leadership always have [positive effects](#) on their employees' motivation, as they are more likely to make them feel more competent in their work, while also improving the quality of relationships in the team."

Professor Gagne said the research found that transformational leadership had a positive impact on motivation regardless of whether organizations experienced a [crisis](#) or not, but another type of leadership behavior also helped during crises.

"Our research demonstrates that managers or leaders who uses transactional leadership behaviors, which consists of monitoring employee behaviors more closely and providing more directives, also helped improve employee motivation. This possibly helps sustain meaning and enjoyment and decrease pressure in the workplace during crises," Professor Gagne said.

"We also found that when the leadership style was aimed at the entire group or aimed at an individual in particular, but witnessed by others, it had a uniform effect on all the individuals within the team. This means that leaders need to be aware that even behaviors aimed at a particular employee are likely to spill over to other team members."

**More information:** Marylène Gagné et al. Uncovering Relations Between Leadership Perceptions and Motivation Under Different Organizational Contexts: a Multilevel Cross-lagged Analysis, *Journal of Business and Psychology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1007/s10869-019-09649-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-019-09649-4)

Provided by Curtin University

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