



## **Is psychology the secret sauce for leadership development in 2021?**

### **The World of Work in 2021: Leader's and Line Manager's Roles**

Kate Pearlman-Shaw Chartered, *Psychologist & Leadership Development Behaviour Change Specialist*

A recent research paper titled '*The Work After Lockdown Study*' funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), reports on the impact on working from home, and predicts new ways of working in 2021 and beyond. Kate Pearlman-Shaw - Clinical Psychologist and Coach, highly skilled and sought-after leadership, team development and business coach, and public speaker has recently reviewed the study and suggested a bespoke approach to tackle the challenges people leaders face when managing and leading from afar.

Using the research alongside her own professional insights, Kate explores the challenges facing people leaders and uses leadership psychology to share a suite of principles ideal for leaders, HR professionals and managers to model, in order to support line managers as they enter a new phase of remote working, UK lockdown restrictions and the uphill battle to manage teams into a new year and through a period of economic recession.

Born and bred in Leeds (Yorkshire, UK), Kate is a Chartered Psychologist, her 30-year career has involved leading Psychology and Counselling services for the NHS, before working for public and private sector organisations across the globe. Now working within the Business Psychology arena with senior leaders and business owners, Kate specialises in helping people to change their behaviours, using evidence based psychological methodologies drawn from the psychotherapies, neuroscience, and the study of effective leadership (including during Covid-19). Using demonstratable models and techniques, Kate helps leaders to change how they interact, approach their roles and crucially, make substantive changes in their organisations.

### **2021: Predictions**

After a gruelling year for almost everyone in all walks of working-life, 2021 offers a difficult start to the new year, with predictions that the workplace landscape will remain tough for the next 12 months and beyond. Despite the rollout of a covid-19 vaccine and the promise of a return to some sort of 'new normal' by the latter half of the year, there is no doubt that the world of work has changed. Perhaps indefinitely?





The launch event for *'The Work After Lockdown Study'* saw researchers and commentators predict that we will not be going back to 'normal' ways of working, with digital innovations and hybrid working styles here to stay, and speculation that people leaders will need to become better equipped to lead and manage in a highly people-centric way.

The preliminary results from the survey (featuring over 1,000 people working from home in professional services and public administration) found that seven in ten employees were in no hurry to return to the office - even if they missed 'water cooler moments', citing their dislike of commuting and preference to spend time with family as key drivers. Nine out of ten believed they were more productive at home, with 60% enjoying the flexibility that working at home brings. On the other hand, the standout downside of working from home is that 80% missed informal contact with their colleagues. A worrying finding was the level of poor mental health, although not of clinical proportions: those with line management responsibility reported a troubling work/life balance between March and July 2020 leading to a noticeable decrease in wellbeing. Line managers and people leaders were found to be the most under pressure.

The original study team reflected that leadership and line management competencies need to change to support the hybrid working that will be the future, particularly enhancing strong people skills. This is vital as both productivity and wellbeing during homeworking are linked to positive relationships with line managers.

On reflection, Kate suggests there is a great deal that leaders, managers, and HR professionals can do to support their line managers for this 'new normal'.

***"We're going to need amateur psychologists"***, says Kate.

As well as their technical expertise and understanding, Kate believes that in 2021 leaders and managers need to be amateur psychologists too, commenting that: *"in this new world of motivating remote workers, managing their own and other's resilience, and influencing from afar, understanding human psychology is now an essential, not a nice to have leadership attribute"*.

Leaders and managers need to know why people behave the way they do, and what their own options are to get the best from each individual they work with. One suggestion from the study's launch event is for HR professionals to audit all line managers and only keep people who have, or could develop, these abilities in positions of responsibility for others.



Following the release of the study, and using her years of professional experience, Kate has developed a set of key principles for line managers operating in this new world of business. Kate believes that all managers need to learn and act upon these principles to lead successfully in this remote business era.

***Based on modern leadership psychology, Kate reveals the primary elements of her 'secret sauce':***

**Understanding people are not rational:**

Although we generally employ people to be rational at work, this is not how humans behave. In the world of psychology, Kate explains that: *"emotion comes before thought, which in turn precedes behaviour."* Furthermore: *"stressed, unhappy, lonely remote worker is going to be driven by emotions and consequent thoughts, not the logic of the task at hand. Knowing and being able to work with this is crucial."*

**Properly listening and attending to feelings:**

Kate believes that leaders need to understand what active listening is and explains: *"in my experience people intellectually understand this, but are often too busy to practice, meaning that colleagues end up feeling neglected, unhappy, anxious and even resentful"*.

**Needing praise is human:**

Kate is quick to confirm that, *"this is not a sign of an over needy person!"*, before going on to say, *"I seem to spend an awful lot of time in my work as a coach talking about the importance of validation or praise. Neuropsychologically, being affirmed by another has a massive impact on the brain, enabling it to get to that logical place we want people to reach."*

**65% of what we think is unconscious:**

In confirming that 65% of what we think is unconscious, Kate explains that: *"judgement is simply something we do."* Before commenting: *"Unconscious bias training increasingly has a bad press, and at a time where mitigating the impact of our bias is more important than ever, knowing this and that we can't eradicate it, yet having the necessary skills to be able to identify and challenge bias in ourselves and others without creating tension is a very difficult but necessary art to learn."*

**Mastering difficult conversations:**

Here Kate reminds us that we are all quite different, and that, no-one likes a difficult conversation - and no method is infallible. She states: *"Psychology tells us a great deal about why we struggle and how different people respond to different approaches."* Adding, *"this is very useful psychology to know, and leads to the ability to make choices about how to go about things with different people."*



### **Showing voluntary vulnerability**

Talking about voluntary vulnerability, Kate says, *“this really does help you to be a highly effective leader of people or a line manager, as this is a fundamental reciprocal behaviour. If you are open and honest with someone, they are more likely to do the same in return. Understanding why, and the impact this has, and how to do this authentically is another skill that can be learnt.”*

### **New habits and routines:**

Kate confirms that, *“changing behaviours, means changing your responses, and we are awfully bad at changing our habits and routines. In this new, and potentially difficult ‘new world’ there is an urgent need to do things differently, especially as we are working in different places and ways.”* Kate explains that new habits and routines, *“require conscious planning, and new knowledge about how to establish new routines.”* Kate confirms that learning from neuropsychology has shed light on how best to incorporate new ways into daily routines and the number of repetitions to try.

### **Understanding how to change, motivate and influence people:**

Basing this principle firmly in psychology, Kate details how, *“we can all learn more about why people hold a view, how they behave as a result, and to recognise what choices we have, and how to enact these to work with, and engage colleagues even more effectively.”*

### **Task Management:**

All these guiding principles require a new and different approach to task management. Kate describes, *“Modern organisations are task driven, often with back-to-back meetings and 100% focus on KPIs. This focus does not drive effective or innovative thought. It does not allow for reflection or resilience methods to be used. This approach does not allow the brain to function properly. Leaders can change this way of working. However, first Leaders need to understand why and how?”*

### **Resilience, Resilience, Resilience:**

Kate believes that to keep oneself resilient, as well as supporting colleagues, relies on the well-proven psychological methods of emotional regulation and behaviour change.

In summarising the principles, Kate says:

***“Fundamentally, 2021 leaders and managers need to be able to understand the way humans work, in order to make conscious, well-informed choices about how they behave themselves, to get the best out of and to support their teams. These guiding principles can be learnt – and need to be learnt!”***



The key to leadership training and learning, is that the learning and choices, need to be in line with the learner's personal characteristics.

It is imperative that leaders know what they personally need 'to do' to adapt their behaviour in a way that maintains their authenticity. What works for one person may not work for another. When running leadership development programmes, Kate finds it is common for two colleagues to emerge with diametrically different skills. Therefore, no off-the-shelf training or tips can do this for an organisation. A bespoke approach, that focusses on the unique needs of the organisation and the people within it, is the only way to ensure results.

Kate suggests that: *"there is no single book to read, nor course to go on, that will equip line managers with all the skills they will need in 2021. Many programmes 'teach' one skill at a time, when in reality a programme that takes a far deeper approach - looking into the underlying psychology, to provide a single set of methods for a wide range of leadership and/or line management situations is more apt. Some coaching, either in a group via a programme or individually, is a key component to any leadership training worth its salt."*

Reflecting on the last decade, Kate observes, *"if we can learn anything from the last 10 years, it's that repetition and the rehearsal of skills through some form of behavioural experimentation and/or an action learning component, means your investment won't be wasted. Whichever you choose, the point here is that with everything going on just now, investing in some support and development for those in your organisation with responsibility for people is going to be vital in 2021."*

**If you are keen to support your line managers and leaders to become 'amateur psychologists', better able to succeed in 2021, then perhaps Pearlman-Shaw Consulting can help?**

Kate demonstrates significant experience making the psychology of leading and managing accessible with sustained results. If you are keen to find out more about Kate's 'secret sauce' and the principles she predicts are key to successful line management in 2021, please contact **Kate Pearlman-Shaw** to explore bespoke training, coaching and consultancy options.

See Kate's website [www.pearlman-shawconsultancy.co.uk](http://www.pearlman-shawconsultancy.co.uk) for more information about her approach and the options available.