

## Boosting virtual team performance

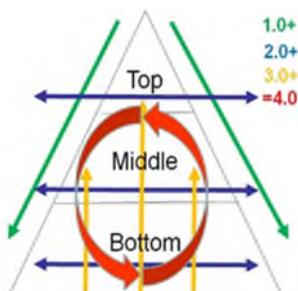
With the covid19 situation continuing, many are now thrown into having to lead, or work in, virtual teams. Virtual teams are not new, and much has been written. This article introduces how the use of some of Complex Adaptive Leadership (CAL) CALagility System methodology can boost virtual team performance by as much as 40%.



The biggest challenge for leaders (not just of virtual teams) is being comfortable with uncertainty and knowing how and when to allow optimal solutions to emerge, rather than seeking to control everything. The common

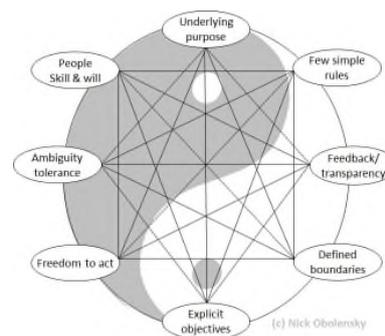
trap of over-control can destroy motivation and engagement, which can be especially damaging for those in a virtual team working in isolation. CAL's Leadership 4.0, its 8 team principles and 4 key leadership strategies can help to avoid this trap. John and Alec, leaders of a large virtual team of over 100 people working on a complex rollout of 5G across the USA in 2019, boosted their team performance by 40% with 50% less team resource using some of the CAL methodologies (the full case study can be read here: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/enabling-fast-5g-rollout-case-study-nick-obolensky/>).

Leadership 4.0 is introduced in the 5G article. Applying only Leadership 1.0 (traditional, downwards) in a virtual environment can be even more damaging in the virtual environment than in the face-to-face one. Motivation is quickly destroyed, and performance can suffer. For more on this aspect see article: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/we-dont-need-another-hero-nick-obolensky/>. Enabling team members to reach out to each other and co-ordinate (Leadership 2.0) as well as leading upwards (Leadership 3.0) is critical. Leadership 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 all combine into leadership 4.0, where a virtual team is dynamic and self-organising, more agile, motivated and high performing like the 5G team.



For Leadership 4.0 to work well two things need to be in place: 8 Team Principles and leaders who know when and how to let go and empower. Below are some critical questions and some key points to consider, all relating to the 8

key principles:



**i. Underlying purpose:** Does the team understand how they, as a team, contribute to the wider (organisational as well as outside) good?

**ii. A few simple rules:** What are the FEW simple rules the team need to employ to ensure performance? Don't impose them, but ask the team to brainstorm what they should be.

**iii. Skill & Will:** This is not just about the technical skill of the individuals but to what extent they have the skill and the will to work virtually. CAL's 6 levels of followers can provide a path – followers need to be at least at Level 5 to be high performing in a virtual team. Those below that level need to be nudged along level by level. The first two levels are “Red Zone” - unacceptable, and often the result of poor leadership. Pairing “buddy coaches” between the top and lower levels will help in this journey. Understand where each team member is and nudge them along to Level 6.

### Types of followers

1. Wait to be told
2. Ask to be told
3. Seek agreement for recommendation
4. Act and inform straight away
5. Act and inform in a routine way
6. Self-organise and exception report

**iv. Tolerance for Ambiguity:** To what extent can the team deal with ambiguity? Focusing on the overall team purpose, as well as individual objectives, can help navigate such uncertainty.

**v. Transparent feedback:** Many articles about virtual teams talk about the need for trust. The more transparent things are the less trust is an issue. Have frequent team catchups using platforms such as skype or zoom and leave time not just to talk about tasks in hand, but also how people are generally coping. On-line platforms such as Microsoft Teams can also help transparency.

**vi. Clear boundaries:** Is the team clear about the team boundary of action and tasks within which they operate? And are the boundaries of working between team members clear?

**vii. Freedom to act:** This is not just the freedom to act within the boundaries, but also the freedom to cross boundaries if needed. And if a leader is telling people WHAT to and HOW to do it, they might restrict freedom.

**viii. Clear individual objectives.** Are individual team members clear on what outputs they should be achieving? If what they are working on is complex, they may well need to have some freedom to set such objectives within given criteria set by leaders.

Many team has such principles well in place, although “Few simple Rules” and “Transparent feedback” often score poorly (see article for more: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/purpose-empowerment-wrong-tree-nick-obolensky/> ).

Even if these 8 principles are well in place, how a leader operates dictates how high performing a virtual team will be. Of the four key leadership strategies (Tell, Sell, Involve, Devolve) our research shows that leaders are TOO involved with what followers are doing and do not let go ENOUGH. Too much Leadership 1.0 (due to fear of uncertainty or need

80% leaders are too involved, 29% damagingly so  
84% leaders do not let go enough, 21% do let go at all\*

\*CAL Global Database Research 2017-2020

to control) prevents more valuable time on connecting cross-boundary (Leadership 2.0) and being more strategic (Leadership 3.0). Not letting go enough kills team creativity as well as dampens performance. Here are some tips: to improve leadership of teams:

- Focus on what CAN be controlled and let the rest go
- If the 8 principles are in place — step back to support rather than stepping in to control
- Pair high performers to help low performers rather than trying to coach everybody
- Seeking perfection can often kill performance. Ask “Is this good enough?” or “Will this work?” NOT “Is this perfect?” or “How would I do it better?”.

- Some words from the wise:

Confucius:

*“Better a diamond with a flaw than a pebble without”*

Voltaire:

*“The best is the enemy of the good.”*

Shakespeare:

*“Striving to better, oft we mar what's well.”*

We hope these tips help boost virtual team performance, but please add you own at:

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6630847602046922752/>



*Nick Obolensky*

**Nick Obolensky**  
Founder, Complex Adaptive Leadership

## WHO ARE COMPLEX ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP?



CAL is an ISO certified global firm which combines modern western Complexity Science with some ancient Chinese wisdom to enable leaders to get better results, faster for less resource/effort, resulting in enhanced organisational agility.

Our interventions extend mindsets from Leadership 1.0 (traditional, albeit redefined many times, with leadership done by leaders/managers, downwards), to cross-boundary organisational Leadership 2.0 (where leadership also has to go sideways and outwards without “formal power”), to Leadership 3.0 (where leadership needs to go upwards with leaders needing to enable and learn to follow the people they lead, and followers needing to learn to take the initiative and lead themselves) which all combine into Leadership 4.0 (where leadership becomes a dynamic, not just a role or attribute).



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