



Effective Leader Needs To Focus On Capacity Gaps



An effective leader is often described by the ability to be capable, adaptable and confident, but also someone who admits to his or her capacity gaps, yet selective in decision making and with the foresight to see challenges lying ahead.

But as leadership coach and author Jesse Sostrin points out, it is crucial to act as a team's "capacity keeper, or the shepherd of the time, energy, resources, and focus" that team members have to dedicate to their essential work.

"We do this to avoid what I call the manager's dilemma, the phenomenon that occurs when the gap between the demands you face and the resources you have available to meet them widens to the breaking point," writes [Sostrin](#), a director at PwC's U.S. Leadership Coaching Center of Excellence and author of *The Manager's Dilemma*.

He adds that when an organisation's culture is shaped by unreasonably high demands that aren't materially supported with adequate resources prolonged capacity gaps cascade throughout an organisation and hurt individuals, teams, and, ultimately, the bottom line.

Chronic capacity gaps increase stress and reduce wellbeing for individuals who must perform against unreasonable expectations in work environments marked by fast-changing, unclear, often conflicting priorities. There are also extremes of activity that produce work-family imbalances and the conditions for disengagement and burnout, Sistrin writes.

On the other hand, capacity gaps could lead to protracted disengagement and team members becoming more likely to blame others for problems and stay in the job even after mentally quitting, a phenomenon that accounts for nearly 70 percent of workers in the U.S. who are less likely to be productive, according to a recent Gallup study that also found that employee disengagement costs the U.S. economy as much as US\$350 billion

a year.

So, what should an effective leader do to keep a team energised and well-fueled, and prevent them from checking out?

1. Take a real-time pulse check and ask: have demands on your people increased recently, with a trend to rise, and have the right resources been allocated to address the demands?
2. Look for evidence of capacity gaps in your culture. If you're unsure, go deeper and ask questions and then listen to the way people talk about their work.
3. Stop trying to solve the problem, but try managing the response better. These are the small choices that we're often too busy to pay attention to that actually compound the issues.

While there is an issue of leadership credibility in the display of courage to ask the questions, real integrity is established by a material response to closing the gaps.

If a team member says, "I'm doing the job of three people since the recent cutbacks," that should be perceived as, "I'm on a path to burnout because there is too much on my plate and the likelihood of critical priorities being overlooked is great because nobody can do the job of three people well."

While this calls for a need of checks and balances to properly assess capacity requirements, an honest dialogue should follow about the true demands of work, with a need to simplify, refocus and develop the courage and confidence to challenge unwritten rules that may directly fuel and sustain the manager's dilemma.

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