

WHY LEADERS MUST CONNECT MORE DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

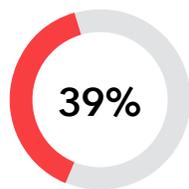
Here's how to show openness and vulnerability authentically.



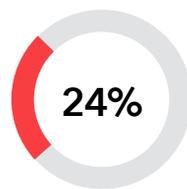
Why is Connection Important?

Many of us have an impulse to connect with others during moments of crisis. When the environment is uncertain, it can be hard to make progress if our managers don't foster a sense of connection with and among employees. Research shows that we need these vital connections to innovate¹ and set the tone for an organization's response.²

Leaders can foster a sense of connection with openness and vulnerability.³ Yet a recent survey of over 12,000 employees found that only **39%** of respondents said their manager often or always displayed openness. Even fewer⁴—**24%**—said their manager was often or always vulnerable.



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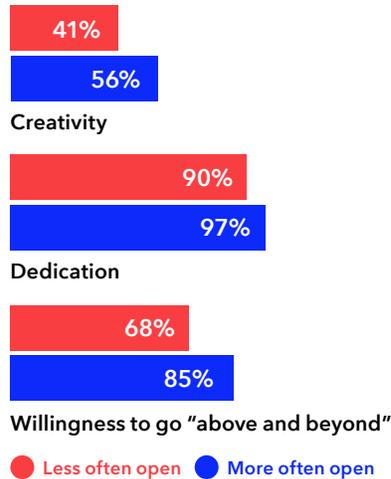
of employees **said their manager was often or always vulnerable.**

These low numbers indicate that managers don't fully understand how crucial connections are to positive work outcomes like employees' creativity, dedication, and willingness to go "above and beyond" to contribute⁵—all essential elements to success during times of crisis.

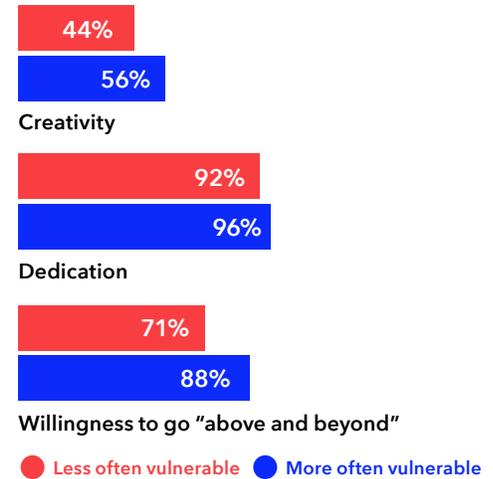
Our survey shows that the percentage of employees who say they are often creative, dedicated, and willing to go "above and beyond" significantly increases when they view their manager as displaying openness more frequently⁶ and when their manager frequently displays vulnerability.⁷

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Impact of Manager Openness on Employee Outcomes



Impact of Manager Vulnerability on Employee Outcomes



An abundance of additional research stresses the importance of connection between leaders and their employees. For example, vulnerability specifically has been identified as a key component of successful leadership.⁸ Understanding and managing emotions are thought to be a building block of effective leadership and change within organizations.⁹

Clearly, organizations should encourage and cultivate openness and vulnerability in their leaders. This isn't to say that being open and vulnerable is an easy practice. On the contrary, it's often difficult to discuss and share emotions and emotional experiences in the workplace. This is true for both positive emotions, such as joy and excitement, and negative emotions, such as fear and confusion. As humans, we are wired to feel a wide range of emotions that we may or may not welcome. And although displays of emotion at work are sometimes judged to be an indicator of weakness,¹⁰ our data show that leaders who shift their thinking and practice openness and vulnerability can become stronger leaders who engender the best qualities in their employees.



Becoming a Connected Leader

Even if managers understand the importance of openness and vulnerability, it can be difficult to know just how to demonstrate them, especially in a work setting. The following tips can help:

Openness: Share information about yourself and show genuine interest in learning more about your employees.

- Create opportunities where you and your team members can ask and answer thoughtful questions to find common interests and form bonds.
 - For example, schedule virtual or in-person coffee breaks or lunches, or start meetings with an icebreaker to help people get to know each other better.
- Demonstrate that you are comfortable talking about emotions at work and dealing with interpersonal challenges.
 - Recognize and acknowledge employees' emotions.
- Find out who colleagues are outside of work and what challenges they may be dealing with at work and at home.
 - Acknowledge their experiences and ask how you can help.

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- Remember that being open with employees doesn't mean oversharing or prying into your team members' lives.
 - Professional and personal boundaries still apply.

Vulnerability: Share your own emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness, anxiety, disappointment, surprise), even when doing so may be uncomfortable.

- Develop and display vulnerability by being willing to share what you're feeling.
 - If you are having a difficult time coping with current events, don't shy away from revealing your emotions. It's likely that your colleagues have similar experiences.
- Keep in mind that being vulnerable is about both creating space for employees to share more about themselves and allowing yourself to be open as well.
 - Lean in to emotionally difficult situations.
- Practice empathy by identifying other people's perspectives and emotions and following up to make sure you're understanding their experiences accurately.
 - Active listening and behavioral mirroring can help show empathy.
- Understand that being vulnerable is a strength, not a weakness.
 - Although you may find it difficult to be honest with yourself and your team about your vulnerabilities, doing so is important.

About This Study



This report was authored by [Emily Shaffer](#), PhD, Director, Research, Catalyst, and Stephanie Neal, Director, Center for Analytics and Behavioral Research (CABER), DDI. The data for this report are derived from questions devised by Catalyst and collected through DDI's [Global Leadership Forecast 2021](#) research project. This report examines responses from 12,382 professionals from 1,742 organizations in more than 40 countries around the world and more than 20 major industry sectors.

AGE		GENDER		SECTOR	
Range:	18-73	Men	72%	Private	66%
Average:	43	Women	23%	Public	27%
TOP 5 INDUSTRIES		Preferred not to self-identify	5%	Government	5%
Manufacturing	17%	Other gender	<1%	Nonprofit	2%
Electronics	12%			LEVEL	
Automotive & Transport	12%			Manager	55%
Consumer Products & Retail	11%			Mid-Level Leader	35%
Financial Services	7%			Individual Contributor	10%

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- 1 Carnevale, J. B., Huang, L., Crede, M., Harms, P., & Uhl-Bien, M. (2017). [Leading to stimulate employees' ideas: A quantitative review of leader-member exchange, employee voice, creativity, and innovative behavior](#). *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 66(4), 517-552; Oke, A., Munshi, N., & Walumbwa, F. O. (2009). [The influence of leadership on innovation processes and activities](#). *Organizational Dynamics*, 38(1), 64-72.
- 2 [Covid-19: Women, equity, and inclusion in the future of work](#). (2020). Catalyst; Shadraconis, S. (2013). [Organizational leadership in times of uncertainty: Is transformational leadership the answer?](#) *LUX: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Writing and Research from Claremont Graduate University*, 2, Article 28.
- 3 An exploratory factor analysis examined seven items designed to measure managerial connectedness. The KMO was .87 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $X^2(21) = 47126.09, p < .001$. A 2-factor solution was found. Factor 1 comprised five items which explained 58.98% of variance. These items represented the construct of openness. Factor two comprised two items which further explained 15.46% of variance. These items represented the construct of vulnerability.
- 4 A paired samples t-test indicated that participants reported significantly higher rates of openness ($M = 3.58$) than vulnerability ($M = 3.04$), $t(12381) = 67.38, p < .001$.
- 5 Simple regression analyses were run to examine the impact of openness and vulnerability on each of these outcomes. In separate analyses, openness significantly predicted creativity ($R^2 = .03, b = .21, t(12380) = 18.80, p < .001$), dedication ($R^2 = .06, b = .19, t(12380) = 28.19, p < .001$), and willingness to go above and beyond ($R^2 = .05, b = .22, t(12380) = 24.91, p < .001$). Vulnerability also significantly predicted creativity ($R^2 = .01, b = .13, t(12380) = 12.78, p < .001$), dedication ($R^2 = .01, b = .06, t(12380) = 9.38, p < .001$), and willingness to go above and beyond ($R^2 = .04, b = .19, t(12380) = 24.12, p < .001$). We acknowledge that these effects are small; however, leaders and managers display a wide range of behaviors that alone may have a small impact but in total can make a notable impact on employee outcomes.
- 6 A chi-square analysis was conducted to test the difference in the percentage of employees who said they often or always were creative when their managers were perceived to more frequently display openness compared to those whose managers less frequently displayed openness ($X^2(1) = 249.60, p < .001$). The percentages were also significantly different for dedication ($X^2(1) = 215.30, p < .001$) and willingness to go above and beyond ($X^2(1) = 425.16, p < .001$).
- 7 A chi-square analysis was conducted to test the difference in the percentage of employees who said they often or always were creative when their managers were perceived to more frequently display vulnerability compared to those whose managers less frequently displayed vulnerability ($X^2(1) = 145.14, p < .001$). The percentages were also significantly different for dedication ($X^2(1) = 76.48, p < .001$) and willingness to go above and beyond ($X^2(1) = 354.00, p < .001$) as a function of manager vulnerability.
- 8 Bunker, K. A. (1997). [The power of vulnerability in contemporary leadership](#). *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 49(2), 122-136; Seppälä, E. (2014). What bosses gain by being vulnerable. *Harvard Business Review*.
- 9 Latting, J. K. & Ramsey, V. J. (2009). [Reframing change: How to deal with workplace dynamics, influence others, and bring people together to initiate positive change](#). ABC-CLIO; Rubin, R. S., Munz, D. C., & Bommer, W. H. (2005) [Leading from within: The effects of emotion recognition and personality on transformational leadership behavior](#). *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(5), 845-858.
- 10 Morin, A. (2014). [The 8 myths about emotions that are holding us back](#). *Forbes*.