

Beware of Micromanagement

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As a long-term observer of management – micromanagement (often rooted in an earnest desire to ensure excellence and prevent errors) is a workplace disaster with far-reaching consequences. It manifests when managers or leaders exert excessive control over the minutiae of their team's work, scrutinizing every detail and leaving little room for autonomy or creative freedom. While the initial intent may be noble – often driven by ambition or (perhaps) anxiety - the effects of micromanagement ripple throughout organisations, stifling innovation, eroding morale, and ultimately hindering productivity.

So, what is micromanagement

Micromanagement refers to the practice of meticulously overseeing and controlling every aspect of a subordinate's work, often beyond reasonable necessity. This style of management typically involves activities such as *constant monitoring* of employees' tasks and activities; *frequent and detailed instructions* on how to perform duties; *limiting delegation of responsibility or autonomy*; *reluctance to trust* employees to make decisions; and *regular interventions and corrections*.

While some degree of supervision is essential – in fact *no* supervision is *poor* management - micromanagement crosses the line. It replaces healthy guidance and support with an oppressive scrutiny, often communicated through endless emails, status meetings, and check-ins that leave employees feeling both undervalued and overwhelmed. An evident symptom of micromanagement is the departure of key personnel – the 'revolving door syndrome'.

Why does micromanagement occur in the first place

In order to address the issue of micromanagement one needs to fully understand why it occurs. Several factors can drive individuals toward this management style. These factors may (and often) include – perfectionism; lack of trust; anxiety (often associated with change); a need to control; insecurity; inexperience in management; and (arguably the hardest to overcome) an organisational culture of micromanagement.

How you recognise micromanagement

Recognizing the signs of micromanagement allows for timely intervention. Some of the clear indicators include - frequent requests for status updates and progress reports; reluctance – on the part of the micromanager - to delegate tasks or projects; focus on unnecessary documentation and structure; managers making decisions that should be left to the team; employees feeling unable to take initiative or propose solutions; regular corrections, edits, or overrides of employees' work; and high levels of frustration, disengagement, or turnover among staff. If these symptoms are present, it is likely that micromanagement is affecting the workplace, with consequences that grow more severe over time.

How does micromanagement impact on the organisation

The impact/effects of micromanagement can be severe. It can *demotivate* employees; cause *disengagement*; stifle *creativity and innovation*; increase *stress*; cause *burnout*; create high *turnover* and poor retention of staff; allow *inefficient use* of resources.

How to remedy micromanagement

Addressing/overcoming micromanagement is no easy task – especially if it has become part of the organisation's culture. Some approaches suggested by the literature include – building trust and delegating; setting clear expectations from the start (including KPIs); focus on outcomes; encourage open communication; develop management and leadership skills (including mentorship opportunities).

Empowerment may be the solution

Wherever and whenever possible – cultivate a workplace culture that values *empowerment*. This involves – encouraging risk taking; recognising and celebrating achievements (both large and small); work on psychological safety; invest in staff development; and promote leadership in the workplace.

Micromanagement - though often stemming from good intentions - can be a destructive force within organisations. By building trust, setting clear expectations, embracing autonomy, and fostering open communication, workplaces can overcome micromanagement tendencies and in turn unlock the full potential of their teams.

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Transformational leadership and the new reality (2025) -

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