

# The rise of 'deep help' – why today's leaders must go beyond shallow advice and favours

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PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Leaders should think of helping as part of their jobs, new research from the UCL School of Management

(<https://www.mgmt.ucl.ac.uk/news/rise-deep-help-why-leaders-must-go-beyond-shallow-advice-and-favours>) suggests. And that help often needs to go beyond the usual quick advice and favours.

According to research by Professor Colin Fisher (<https://www.mgmt.ucl.ac.uk/people/colinfisher>), leaders in organisations that do complex, knowledge-intensive work often need to provide deep help—spending hours or even days assisting employees with tricky, persistent problems in their work. These findings are based on a multi-year study at a major design consultancy, recently published in Academy of Management Journal (<http://amj.aom.org/content/early/2017/10/24/amj.2016.0207>).

Along with co-authors Julianna Pillemer from The Wharton School and Teresa Amabile from Harvard Business School, Fisher suggests that deep help can play a major role in the success of projects, especially when businesses adopt flatter, more collaborative approaches to management.

“Getting genuinely valuable help can be difficult when teams are overwhelmed by the ambiguities of a project and the pressure to complete it,” says Fisher. “Addressing the most important problems often requires more than a quick conversation.

“However, many leaders still fear that deep involvement equates to micromanagement. Our findings suggest that leaders can be most effective in offering deep help if they are careful in the ways they talk about the time they spend with those they are helping, and send clear signals that they aren't there to take over the work or to evaluate subordinates.”

The researchers found two distinct kinds of deep help. First, leaders served as “guides” when they helped project teams through an especially tricky issue by working intensely in long, tightly clustered sessions. Guiding includes asking questions, listening and looking closely at people's work before suggesting a way forward.

Second, leaders served as “path-clearers” when they addressed a persistent problem in briefer, intermittent sessions. These sessions took the heat off of employees by doing whatever needed to be done – even more menial tasks like ordering lunch.

Fisher suggests that organisations should take several actions to promote deep help. These include giving senior employees flexibility in their schedules and making it clear to teams that managers want to help. The biggest change, though, may be encouraging leaders to consider helping as a critical part of managing in today's business world.

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