

## Three skills that promote developmental mindsets, macro learning, and boost performance

By Ulla Lilliehöök, Executive Coach at [Internova & Co.](#) 2024

Managers who get caught up in micromanagement provide precise instructions to quickly resolve issues, preventing employees from learning and developing. This leads to uncertainty and passivity among employees, and takes a lot of time for managers.

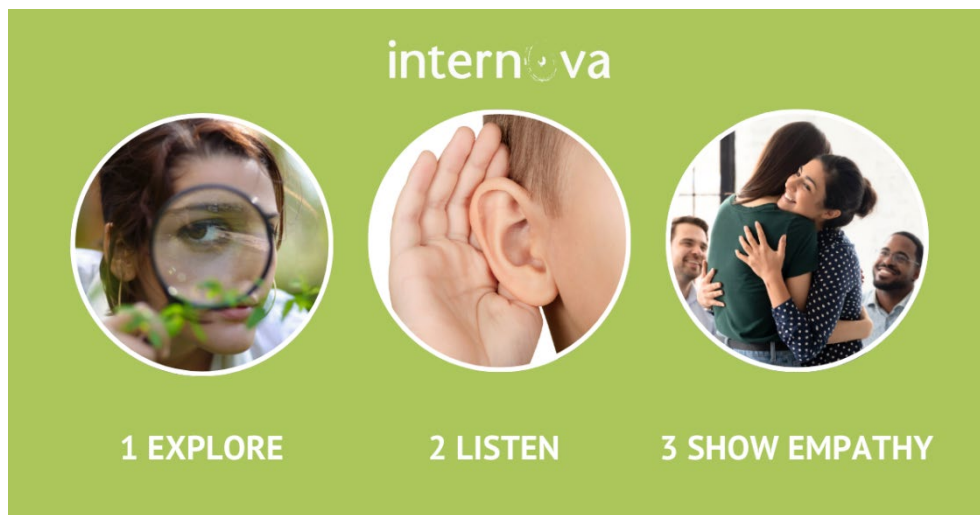
Instead, managers should see recurring problems as learning opportunities, and coach employees to find solutions themselves. Through regular 1-on-1 meetings, managers can boost employees' confidence and engagement, leading them to become more independent and effective.

Microlearning means managers continuously address daily situations where employees need to develop. By equipping managers with coaching skills and following up on a weekly or monthly appraisal, a culture of growth and learning is created.

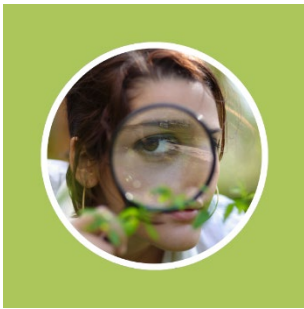
Regular individual conversations of 10-30 minutes per week or every two weeks can have a huge cumulative effect. This is cost-effective and leads to a resilient and adaptable organization.

To create micro-development in companies, a developing mindset is needed. Managers should see failure as opportunities to grow, and be curious about their employees' needs and strengths. By asking questions, listening actively, and showing empathy, leaders can promote employee development and well-being. When many people in the company micro-learn and develop weekly, this leads to the company macro-learning. The chances of companies succeeding with change increase significantly.

It explains the three skills, which promote developmental mindsets, regular learning, and performance boosts. The skills are fundamental to **coaching leadership**.



## 1 – Investigate by asking questions



Investigate is about asking the right questions in the right way. The difference between a well-developed survey-based approach and a clunky "do and tell" approach is huge. Well-timed questions can transform our interactions, relationships, and ability to engage with development opportunities.

We encourage leaders to "ask more and tell less." Asking takes time and requires attention, while the "tell" method is quick and easy. Many managers feel they need the answers, but research shows that this often leads to repetitive storytelling and reduced efficiency.

Leadership guru Jim Collins (in the book "From Good to Great"), reminds us that great leaders ask many questions. By asking, they gain access to important information, such as facts, insights, and ideas. To create a climate of trust where the truth is heard, leaders need to increase their "ask-tell" ratio and use storytelling more restrictively.

### Ask more, tell me less

What a positive challenge – to double our questions! Leaders who ask more questions empower employees to come up with their own solutions, foster collaboration, encourage innovation, and create an environment where people thrive.

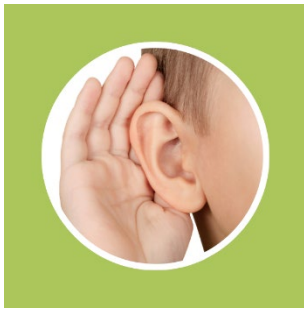
The quality of the questions is important. Organizational psychologist Edgar Schein emphasises the power of "humble inquiry." He believes that subordinates often withhold important information. By asking questions and showing genuine interest (empathy), leaders can create a culture of trust and openness.

Increasing the ratio of questions to claims is key. We live in a world where we often tell (read talk) too much. There is always a need to solve problems, but we can create a better balance by asking more questions.

### Examples of open-ended questions in investigating:

- What do you think is the reason why you don't deliver on time?
- Have you had any similar problems before? How did you solve it then?
- What ideas do you have on how to solve the current problem?
- Which do you think is the best idea? Are there any obstacles on the way? What can you do if you encounter Obstacle X? What can you do if you encounter obstacles Y... and on until all obstacles have been solved.
- When do you have the opportunity to test your solution in real life?

## 2 – Listen to learn



One of the most important skills is listening. The more you listen to your employees' thoughts, thoughts, ideas, the more you will both get to know them and understand them better. This is the start of making them grow and develop.

Often, we listen just to respond, instead of understanding the other person. We are quick to think of our answer and thus miss the opportunity to learn something new. Listening to learn is not our natural inclination, but it is a skill that can open up new opportunities

for us as leaders.

Is it really possible that highly qualified professionals need to learn to listen?  
The answer is yes.

When we listen actively and show that we care about what the other person says, a magical connection is created. People begin to share their real thoughts, fears, and joys. This honest and generative connection is rare, but extremely valuable.

Listening is a fundamental skill in developmental leadership. It is something we can practice daily, and that gives a high return. By becoming better at listening, we can see our relationships change and improve, both in our work life and in our private lives.

### Examples of open-ended questions on listening to learn:

- Turn off all inner thoughts and be in the present of the current situation
- Make sure to be in an undisturbed place
- Avoid talking yourself by talking about your own experiences
- Let the other person talk at least 80% of the time
- Be aware of your body language - maintain eye contact and confirm you are listening by nodding or saying something short.
- Listen to learn more about the person you're talking to

## 3 – Show empathy to create security



Many leadership theories believe empathy is an important part of leadership. It is the key to building relationships and creating trust. Without empathy, people can't feel confident enough to ask questions, show vulnerability. The degree of empathy directly impacts employee performance.

Managers can learn empathy by developing their empathic abilities through coaching and training, among other things.

Managing emotions is an important part of our work. Negative emotions can hugely affect employee performance. Then managers need to handle them in the right way. Empathy means showing care by understanding the experiences and feelings of others. When we show empathy, people feel seen and heard.

The safer a person feels around you, the more they dare to express their feelings such as worry, frustration, which is important because it affects the person's performance negatively. As you increase your skills in both investigating and listening, your empathic ability will also become more visible.

### Examples of open-ended questions in showing empathy:

- Show interest in other people (ask questions and listen to learn)
- Speak up when you don't understand to get more clarity on what others are telling you
- Feel free to summarise what you hear to ensure for both parties that you have understood
- Demonstrate commitment and understanding of others' thoughts, problems, and ideas
- Keep an open mind and be humble

“We need to dispel the myth that **empathy** is “walking in someone else’s shoes.”

Rather than walking in your shoes, I need to learn how to listen to the story your tell about what it’s like in your shoes and **believe you even when it doesn’t match my experiences.**”

Brené Brown



## Summary

In order for companies to be more successful with change, managers need to adopt a developmental mindset through coaching leadership. The Hudson Institute identifies three key skills for this: inquiry, listening, and empathy.

**Investigate:** Ask questions to understand problems and find solutions. This promotes trust and commitment.

**Listen:** Listen actively to truly understand the other person, which creates strong relationships.

**Empathy:** Show care and interest in others, which creates security and improves performance.

These three skills are fundamental to coaching leadership, which promotes developmental mindsets, regular learning, and leads to performance increases.

## Sources

- Hudson Institute – "Rethinking Leadership: a Blueprint for Growth, Starting with You", by Michael Hudson 2024
- Edgar Schein, Organizational Psychologist, "Humble Inquiry"
- Jim Collins, From Good to Great
- René Brown, "Atlas of the Heart" 2021

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Internova excels in equipping managers and employees with expertise in Time Management, Transformative Leadership, Coaching Leadership theory, and Goal Management skills. With over 20 years of experience, Internova has been instrumental in enhancing the performance of companies, organizations, and individual managers alike.

### Research based learning

To ensure the high quality and the benefits of Internova's courses, all methods and theories are based on research covering management, leadership, work-life pedagogy, work-life psychology, science of happiness at work, stress management and organisational development.

### Our philosophy

Internova's philosophy revolves around micro-learning through multiple brief sessions spanning a longer period of time. This approach enables participants to integrate and practice newly acquired knowledge and skills in their daily work, fostering the development of desired habits over time.

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