



## Zoom In, Zoom out

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Every camera and cellphone has a zoom function, which allows for different viewing perspectives – from a wide scale, broad view to a micro look at the tiniest of detail. Neither perspective is better than the other, and each serves a different purpose.

Depending on your innate nature, your style of management would tend to lean into one of these two perspectives. Yet the ability to switch as necessary between the bigger picture and the nitty gritty of the business is a hallmark of an agile and responsive leadership style.

## Zooming-in and zooming-out

There are times as a leader when you need to be close to things. In these times you are literally “in the engine room”, sorting things out with the crew. Specifics, practical knowledge, and attention to detail matter. This is being zoomed-in.

At other times you’re the captain on the bridge. You set the destination, decide on the best course and speed, direct crew members and ensure the right procedures are followed. You’re at the helm and those in the engine room rely on you to steer the ship in the best possible way. This is being zoomed-out.

## Where does the challenge lie?

Neither perspective is better than the other. It is the right perspective at the right moment that yields the best results. The challenge lies in being able and willing to change perspectives. It is easy to default into the mode that feels most natural and comfortable, or that has proven successful previously. Consider for example the case of an Operations Manager, used to focusing on detail, being promoted to a team management role. Micro-management is what has always produced results, so the natural tendency would be to micro-manage the team. Leading a team, however, requires more zooming-out than in. This may feel new and unnatural.

At the other end of the scale are the great visionaries and strategists who risk staying zoomed-out for too long or at the wrong time. Such leaders could be perceived as distant and out of touch with the field.

Crisis times are another example. Sticking to the perspective one has always held comes naturally. Yet a crisis is precisely the moment when the ability to switch flexibly between different perspectives could be the critical factor in successful crisis management.

### Common pitfalls

When a zooming leadership style gets stuck on one setting it starts displaying some common pitfalls. Consider for example the following:

#### Zooming-in

- Getting overwhelmed with details
- Micro-managing
- Putting strong emphasis and relying on personal relationships
- Taking things too personally / too emotionally
- Focusing on moment-to-moment management and so missing out on opportunities or threats

#### Zooming-out

- Potentially neglecting or ignoring pressing practical issues in favour of the wider view
- Pursuing the vision regardless of human cost
- Losing touch with the ‘people on the floor’; becoming too impersonal
- Setting unrealistic or too challenging goals, being unaware of challenges on the ground
- Less flexibility and adaptability if sticking to the bigger picture too rigidly

## Zooming in real

Practicing zooming in real life requires an honest examination of one's own management style. Without it, it's easy to fall into the trap of habit and remain doing things as you always have done.

### Moment of reflection

Q1: What is your natural management style – zoomed-in or zoomed out?

Q2: What have been the positive and negative impact of your management style (zoomed in vs zoomed out) on your team?

Q3: What would help you to switch management styles when required?

- Think back to a challenging situation you and your team resolved successfully. What leadership style did you adopt then? Was it helpful? If so, why?
- Think of a challenging situation you and your team faced where your leadership style was not helpful. Why was it so? What lessons did you draw from it?
- Reflect on the example of a leader you regard as inspiring (business or otherwise) who demonstrates a clear ability to zoom-in/out at the right time for the right reason. What insights can you draw from their zooming style?

## Call for action

- Think of a challenging situation you recently encountered.
- Use the zoom-in/out mode to look at the situation from different perspectives. Note which perspective comes more easily to you.
- Can you come up with three options to handle the situation?
- Choose one option you believe would be best for you and those involved.
- Zoom-in and act depending on the choice you made

## Conclusion

Zooming is a metaphor for a leader's ability to assess different scenarios from different points of view. High quality leadership requires both abilities – zooming out (the broad view) as well as zooming in (the detailed view). It also requires the skill to know which one to practice when.

Practicing zooming-in and out mindfully, on a regular basis, for a variety of management issues enables a leader to be mentally agile, receptive, and open-minded. At the same time, it increases the team's energy resources by cultivating a more engaging and motivating work environment.