

Differentiated Management

**A people-centered, holistic
management approach**

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Differentiated Management: Strategy

Content

Adjust Inputs and information moving between parties

- Multi-modal (digital, physical, aural, written)
- Frequent (allowing for opting-in or out to meet needs)
- Multi-Directional (not just top-down)

Management challenges addressed

- Change Management (Waterfall to Agile; Acquisition; PIP/Firing)
- Employees with Varied Needs (Visual/Aural Processing; Easily Distracted; Out of Office; Remote)

Example: Giving Feedback

Using validating language

Focus on impact

Highlight growth areas

Pair on measurable outcomes

Example: Communicating Change

Have the hard conversations

Stay with the "knowns"

Acknowledge strong emotions

Offer alternative times to discuss

Share other modes of communication



Differentiated Management: Strategy

Process

Adjust the way things are done, locally and globally

- Make processes transparent
- Empower team members to learn "how things work"

Management challenges addressed

- Empower teams to make their own changes
- Empower broader changes and communication among your team and into the broader organization

Example:

Empowering Team Change

Refine the problem together
Model and lead discussions
Support systematic experimentation
Review and iterate

Example:

Empowering Broad Changes

Address and validate concerns
Refine the problem
Set realistic expectations
Facilitate connections
Review



Differentiated Management: Strategy

Product

Allow for flexibility in output

- Multi-modal (digital, physical, aural, written)
- Multi-directional

Management challenges addressed

- Employees with Varied Needs (Visual/Aural Processing; Easily Distracted; Out of Office; Remote)
- Innovation

Example: Remote Employees

Specify the necessary work outcome

Establish clear expectations together

Review product of work at midpoint and end

Compare product to expectations

Evaluate improvement together

Example: Easily Distracted

Specify the necessary work outcome

"Interview" employee to learn where they feel they perform best

Engage employee in a way that utilizes their strengths

Establish clear work expectations together



Differentiated Management: Persona

Keona Washington

Keona is a high-performing tester on a scrum team. While there are many other testers across The Big Company, the majority of Keona's interactions are with you or her scrum team. Keona completes her work on time and with great detail.

The scrum master on Keona's team has approached you because he is concerned with Keona's stress level. Keona appears distraught toward the end of every sprint. She is working well after hours to get work done, and it seems that she is reluctant to let anything go until the very end of every sprint. When you have talked with Keona in the past, you notice that she is the first to criticize herself, yet constructive feedback is salt in the wound. Keona's demeanor is beginning to impact the scrum team.

Readiness	Interests
<p>Eager to perform</p> <p>Focused exclusively on end-results, which can get in the way of longer-term action</p> <p>Shows intense anxiety over completing work</p>	<p>Enjoys playing cello in the city orchestra and chamber group</p> <p>Spends time on the company's Equality and Diversity committee</p> <p>Enjoys reading non-fiction books and business magazines</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Lived Experience</p> <p>Highly social, participates in social groups (orchestra, equality)</p> <p>Goal-oriented, enjoys setting and achieving goals; good at breaking up work</p>	



Differentiated Management: Background

Keona Washington

Keona has always put extra pressure on herself to do well in all of her endeavors. Keona is a highly talented person, and experiences a lot of anxiety in her life around failure and feeling like a failure. She gets nervous about deadlines because she worries she won't have enough time to test everything she thinks should be tested. This anxiety is a big component in Keona's stress, and causes her to procrastinate on completing work items. The anxiety becomes evident to other team members toward the end of each sprint.

Her anxiety is compounded by some frustrations that she has had in dealing with the scrum master, who she notes frequently interrupts her when she raises concerns about testing toward the end of the sprint. Keona always maintains her demeanor in meetings, but is frequently left feeling unheard and frazzled after these meetings, which only increase the amount of stress she feels about the work she needs to do.

Keona relieves her anxiety through action and interaction. She is active in the Equality and Diversity committee in the company, working to develop awareness of programs, and to develop true allyship in the company. She enjoys playing cello in the local orchestra as well as chamber music, and her experiences in music have helped her with teamwork and with complex thinking and problem solving

Differentiated Management: Persona

Michael Naidoo

Michael is one of four SDETs on the automation team. He does most of his work, but seems to ignore key tasks intentionally. During meetings, Michael is not an active participant.; however, he is often overheard criticizing management and the company. He frequently makes snide comments, saying he is joking if his behavior is called out.

Michael has worked at the company for 8 years, and holds institutional knowledge. However, the automation manager has reported that Michael is putting up more resistance after being passed over for this latest promotion. You are concerned that replacing Michael would be difficult, but you are also concerned that the whole automation team will become poisoned by Michael's increasingly poor attitude.

Readiness	Interests
Reluctant to share feelings Says what people want to hear in the moment	Leaving detailed social-media reviews for restaurants and stores World cup soccer Coaching his daughter's soccer team
Lived Experience	
Family difficulties, including a recent divorce Passed over for promotions twice in the past two years	



Differentiated Management: Profile

Michael Naidoo

Michael is one of four SDETs on the automation team. As one of the more experienced members of the automation team, he is aggravated by the fact that there is not more structure or priority put into expanding the automation team. The team is fairly stretched, and he doesn't believe they can handle the current work load much longer, without compromising the health of the automation testing and pipeline. Michael knows that if he were less skilled, much of the extra work that he picks up to support his team would never get finished. In general, Michael is a well-respected member of his team.

Michael has brought his concerns up to his direct manager, Bill, repeatedly, but Bill does not appear to have acted on his suggestions. Michael is highly frustrated with Bill's apparent lack of action, and he takes many opportunities to make his frustration known. Some people laugh with Michael, while others are not sure what to do about his snide remarks.

Michael is experiencing some stress in his home life because of his recent divorce, which is causing him financial and emotional stress. Michael has requested more flexibility in his schedule to accommodate changing child-care needs. Also, he has been passed over for promotion for a few years, despite being told he is doing good work when he asks for feedback. This has caused a higher level of distrust in Michael, and he feels reluctant to make complaints or bring any concerns to management. However, he would like more transparency into what is happening.

Differentiated Management: Persona

Lucas Rodriguez

Luke works days, nights, and weekends, and is on top of every assignment in his mid-sized testing team. He seems like the dream employee who never says no to a task. Luke's assignments are completed on time and they are done very well. On the surface, Luke doesn't seem to have any problems.

However, recently, Luke has been coming to work sick, and he has been sending emails and chat requests to people at night, even contacting some employees on weekends. While his performance is excellent, you are concerned that his attitude will impact the working environment. A few people have come up to you and asked if they, too, should be working nights or weekends, and are concerned about their work/life balance. Luke appears to be getting sick more frequently. It appears he may be pushing himself too hard.

Readiness	Interests
Derives value from being seen as the martyr for the team Becomes extremely defensive at constructive feedback Seems to be more tired and sick	Enjoys speaking at local meetups Still involved in local tech groups and hackathons He and his wife volunteer at local food shelter on weekend mornings
Lived Experience	
Has a family with a new baby Spent several years working as solo tester and automation engineer in various startups before joining a mid-sized testing team	



Differentiated Management: Profile

Lucas Rodriguez

Lucas is the type of person who has always pushed himself hard to succeed. He has been pushing himself even harder because he would like to be eligible for a promotion in order to better support his new family.

Lucas thinks that pushing himself, volunteering for every assignment, and doing excellent work is the best way for him to get recognized by the company. But he's feeling the consequences of pushing too hard. Focusing in meetings is more difficult, and he has fallen sick a few times. However, since he took parental leave to be with his wife and baby, he feels concerned that if he misses more time, he will hurt his chances of being recognized for a promotion.

Lucas is really motivated by speaking at local meetups, and he has a lot of great connections because of his activity at meetups. In particular, he enjoys meetups that focus on tech and helping others, and works with Feeding Families, a local company that works with startups to end food waste.

Differentiated Management: Persona

Elena Patera

Elena is a senior tester on a large test team. She is known for her hard work and excellent contributions to the team. However, some team members perceive her critiques to be argumentative and negative, and have shared this with you. Elena frequently questions policy changes, and struggles when there are not specific answers for her questions. She can be very demanding on time and energy.

Elena would like to have more leadership responsibilities in her career, and is coming to you for advice about how to share her thoughts and express her concerns in a way that enables her to both be herself and advance her career.

Readiness	Interests
<p>Shows steady growth in personal and professional endeavors</p> <p>Struggles with hearing constructive feedback</p> <p>Struggles with ambiguity or lack of clarity in process and instructions</p>	<p>Loves to help other team members, especially more junior team members</p> <p>Enjoys learning about different testing methodologies</p> <p>Organizes events for the company's "Women in Tech" group</p>
Lived Experience	
<p>Bad past employment experiences have eroded Elena's trust in management and co-workers</p> <p>Elena has had some recent personal difficulties that she has revealed to you,; she has expressed that these difficulties are impacting her at times.</p>	



Differentiated Management: Persona

Elena Patera

Elena is a senior tester on a large test team. She has been a tester for more than ten years, and she has a great deal of knowledge about her product, as well as testing processes. She loves helping junior testers, preparing materials and providing training for new team members, as well as the company's Women in Tech group. Elena is thinking about becoming a manager or trainer in the future.

Elena has a general distrust of management that stems from some previous employment experiences. This distrust pervades her experience and communication. Elena has difficulty if procedures or requests are not spelled out in extreme detail.

When Elena has received *indirect* feedback about her performance, she has reacted with strong negative emotion and some anger. Many have noticed that Elena has strong emotional reactions and, as a result, are afraid to share direct feedback with her. Elena has had some extra personal pressures that have surfaced in her home life, and these are contributing to some of Elena's behavior at work.

Differentiated Management: Persona

Ryan Singh

Ryan is one of two testers in a small startup. A self-professed "test-nerd", Ryan got into software testing after being in bio-tech development for several years. His passion for testing is deep, and he is constantly reading and learning. Ryan has a hard time resisting sharing his testing knowledge, even if it's not the focus of discussion. While Ryan seems well-intentioned, his frequent interruptions to explain test theory in great detail tend to derail the scrum team. Some of the developers have expressed their frustration to you. You also notice that Sue, the new tester on the team, has decreased her participation in meetings and stops talking when Ryan enters the room. You are concerned that she will become disengaged. You want Ryan to share, but in appropriate times and places.

Readiness	Interests
<p>Feels that he is a positive contributor to the team</p> <p>Explains away constructive feedback as "other people's problem"</p> <p>Unrealistic expectations of other team members</p>	<p>Testing, software development, writing code</p> <p>Plays guitar in a local band</p> <p>Adjunct biology professor at CC</p> <p>Enjoys regulated industries</p>
Lived Experience	
<p>Gifted and talented student with an advanced degree in Biology</p> <p>Self-taught development for data science at bio-tech company</p> <p>Became interested in testing after learning about regulations in bio-tech</p>	



Differentiated Management: Persona

Ryan Singh

Ryan is one of two testers in a small startup. Ryan enjoys learning, and is educated and well-read in a variety of topics. Technology is his second career. He spent several years on his first career in biology, earning a doctorate in biotechnology. As a result, Ryan is very aware that he is intelligent.

Ryan taught himself programming to analyze data from his dissertation, and continued using those skills in his first workplace. The addition of regulations and quality control and the problem solving skills needed to address problems fascinated Ryan, enough that he moved into tech and focused on jobs in software testing. Ryan is keenly aware of exploratory testing and automation, and is a champion of using both to achieve results and compliance.

Ryan doesn't hide his frustration with other team members who struggle with concepts. He comes off as arrogant at times, even though it appears he doesn't understand how his behavior is making other people feel. Ryan thinks his co-worker, Sue, is quite bright, but he has noticed she hasn't been speaking up as much.

Because Ryan does exceptional work and has always been gifted, he rarely receives constructive feedback. When he does receive constructive feedback, he immediately assumes it is due to a lack of understanding on the part of someone else.

Ryan enjoys playing guitar in a band every week, and is an adjunct professor at a local community college.

Differentiated Management: Persona

Janet Jones

Janet is a lead tester in a mid-sized team. She oversees 3 junior testers. The juniors are afraid to approach her with questions because she reacts with frustration when they don't understand her the first time. Janet is bright, and is often correct in her observations, but she insists on making her points known through yelling and intimidating when there is disagreement. One senior team member, as well as a junior team member, have approached you about their concerns. They are feeling difficulty working with Janet. However, she is a key producer on the team, and letting her go would be a huge knowledge loss.

Readiness	Interests
<p>Dislikes feedback she gets from others, so is ready to change</p> <p>Doesn't fully understand that her responses are causing team discomfort</p> <p>Doesn't respond well to constructive feedback</p>	<p>Enjoys volunteering in her community for children's center</p> <p>Spends time on social media (twitter and linkedIn) writing posts about testing</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Lived Experience</p> <p>Had a difficult past; bits and pieces come out over time in meetings</p> <p>Moved up in the company with reputation of "tough girl" persona</p> <p>History of outbursts with other team members and managers</p>	



Differentiated Management: Persona

Janet Jones

Janet is a lead tester in a mid-sized team., overseeing three junior testers. Janet started her career at her company as a customer service representative. Janet's no-nonsense attitude and commitment to solving problems made her popular in customer support. Her ability to learn quickly and solve increasingly complex problems helped her move into tier 2 and 3 technical support.

Finally, Janet applied for a job as a software tester. She has been a tester for a few years, moving quickly into more senior testing roles due to her ability to master new testing techniques, and her passion for keeping up with the testing profession. Janet becomes frustrated when people don't learn or understand things as quickly as she does, and she has a past history that makes it difficult for her to control her reactions in the moment.

Janet has been able to provide wins for testing team because she doesn't back down from developers, but she is also perceived as highly aggressive, due to her tendency to react emotionally and forcefully with those who disagree. She has yelled in one or two circumstances.

Janet is aware that she is not perceived as an effective communicator. She wants to change how she communicates because she doesn't like the feedback she's getting, but at the same time, she has difficulty taking the feedback that might help her the most.

Communication Skills for Differentiated Management

from Dialectical Behavioral Therapy

These skills are useful for communicating in any relationship while ensuring that you are maintaining respect for yourself and others. The acronym "**DEAR MAN**" is used to help recall these skills when a situation quickly becomes uncomfortable and feels out of control. Also, these skills help to alleviate anxiety in conversations that might be uncomfortable.

DESCRIBE

Describe the situation. Stick to the facts, including observations and behaviors that you noticed. i.e. "I noticed that you've missed five of the past six staff meetings we had."

EMOTIONS

Describe your feelings about the situation. Be as clear as you can about why you are making the request. i.e. "I feel concerned when you don't attend meetings because it sets a poor example for junior team members"

ASSERT

Ask directly for what you want or need. Be willing to work with someone to remove blockers. i.e. "I need you to attend meetings regularly. If you need to miss occasionally, I need notice beforehand and for you to follow up afterward."

REINFORCE

Reinforce the need and remind the person of how this helps them. i.e. "When you do attend meetings, you always provide meaningful feedback. Remember the risk-based testing initiative? You were the person who brought that to the table, if I recall.:"

MINDFUL

Sometimes, a request may cause someone to deflect, argue, or try to change the subject if they have strong feelings. Repeat your request using simple language and remain mindful of your own emotions and goals.

APPEAR CONFIDENT

Managing is HARD, and sometimes we have conversations that we don't want to have. If you don't feel confident, appear confident through using good eye contact, a calm and even voice tone, excellent posture, or other cues.

NEGOTIATE

Be willing to hear ideas or solutions from the other person. They may share information that helps us to better understand the situation. Be willing to compromise to get what you need and solve the core problem.