

Distributed (or Shared) Leadership as a 21st Century Tool to Transform the Public Sector

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About **70%** of leaders rate themselves as inspiring and motivating

HOWEVER . . .

A Gallup engagement survey found that 82% of employees see their leaders as fundamentally uninspiring

Source: Hougaard, R., Carter, J. and Brewerton, V. "Why Do So Many Managers Forget They're Human Beings?" HBR January 29, 2018

<https://hbr.org/2018/01/why-do-so-many-managers-forget-theyre-human-beings>

Managers/leaders account for at least 70% of the variance in employee/follower engagement scores.

Leadership is **key** to organizational performance.

When employees/followers are intrinsically motivated or engaged:

- they are 32% more committed

- 46% more satisfied with their job

- they demonstrate a 16% increase in performance/productivity

Source: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-frontline-workers-are-disengaged>

Source: <https://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/195803/employees-really-know-expected.aspx>



Most leadership theory is about attributes, competencies and behaviours of individual leaders and their leadership styles.

The emphasis is on the dichotomy of the leader-follower(s): one person leading a group of people.

DL puts **leadership** - as a concept 'centre stage' rather than individual leaders

What is Distributed Leadership?

Leadership is not something 'done' by an individual 'to' others, nor a set of individual actions through which people contribute to a group or organization

Leadership is a group activity that works through and within relationships and for a common purpose

Source: Neha Chatwani (Ed). Distributed Leadership. The dynamics of balancing leadership with followership. Palgrave Series on Leadership and Followership. UK 2018

DL embraces three premises:

- ❖ leadership is an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals or groups;
- ❖ the openness to the boundaries and dynamic/fluid nature of leadership
- ❖ varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few

The (football) team . . .

- DL (dis)associates from designated organizational roles and embraces a systemic approach – *everyone can score a goal to win the game, the approach needs coordination and common purpose*
- DL is inclusive of all actions of **all individuals** at all levels of responsibility and therefore involves **pluralistic engagement** – *only the whole team can win the game, no one individual can do it alone*
- DL is a facilitated distribution of responsibility between individuals based on **expertise and knowledge**, not only **experience** within a role or seniority – *the skills and knowledge of each individual are essential*

The best teams minimize on-field communication and reduce the need for centralized leadership because specific plays or sequences of tasks need to be done quickly and efficiently, and everyone knows what needs to be done!



What DL is and is not

- DL **is not** about leadership **delegation nor the leader delegating**. It is about **dialogue** between levels of responsibility
- It **is not** about up-down decision making but about gathering **collective intelligence and knowledge**, deliberate iteration and discussion until the best solution is found
- It **is** based on **shared meaning and purpose** as well as **common goals**

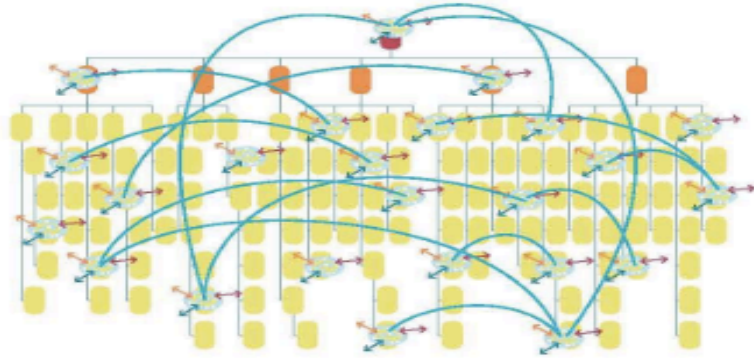
DL Myths

- DL is deliberate, intentional and coordinated not spontaneous and intuitive or laissez-faire
- DL does not negate the role of senior directors or CEOs nor does it weaken the responsibilities of a leader
- DL is not a blueprint for leadership and management
- Not everyone is a leader from a distributed perspective
- DL is not only about collaborative situations and flat hierarchies

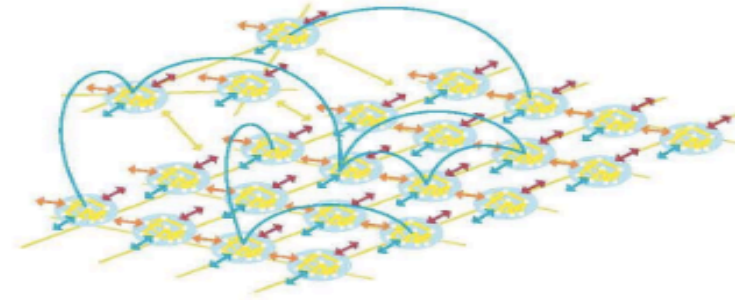
What does DL need to work

1. Actors need AUTONOMY, ACCOUNTABILITY and CAPACITY for action (Ownership)
2. The focus is on ACTIONS (the what and the how) rather than processes or structures
3. The design of a REFLECTIVE process to scaffold action
4. An understanding that DL is ENABLING – a means to an end
5. Recognition of the HYBRID nature of distributed leadership that values working alongside, rather than replacing, formal leaders

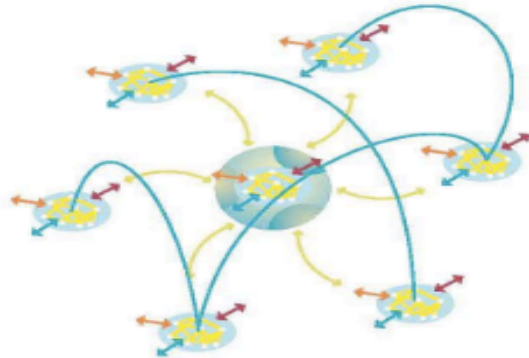
Distributed Leadership in Hierarchies



Distributed Leadership in Flat Organizations



Distributed Leadership in Nimble Networks



Distributed Leadership Across Organizations



Source: Distributed Leadership: From Pyramids to Networks: The Changing Leadership Landscape by Deborah Ancona and Elaine Backman MIT Leadership Center, October 2017

Common Elements of DL Systems

- (Spontaneous) Forms of Collaboration
- Multi-directional Influence
- Local Entrepreneurship
- Global Purpose
- Peer Mitigation of Risk

Case study: Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU)

Founded in 1898

Europe's largest (public) triple accredited business school

Over 2000 staff and 2100 students

First female Rector: Prof Hanappi-Egger since 2015

DL in the Rectorate composed of 5 members

Case study source: Neha Chatwani (Ed). Distributed Leadership. The dynamics of balancing leadership with followership. Palgrave Series on Leadership and Followership. UK 2018

- ✓ Mindmap the leadership vision (strategy) and deliberate team construction

“I really very consciously chose the people because I was looking for maximum diversity within the team. I always had the basic idea that being challenged is good for the quality of the decisions that we will make. I was not looking for people, who would be agreeing with me all the time.”

- ✓ Weekly meetings (4 hours) all contribute to agenda, avoid last minute items, delay decisions if consensus can not found, to mitigate possible urgencies put items ahead of time on the agenda, debrief from all resorts, constructive criticism

“Of course, I could decide many issues on my own, that is my formal role, but we have not yet had one situation where we could not find a compromise. Sometimes we need to take the time to re-think”

✓ Monthly informal dinner to develop trust

“It is also about having the courage to ask. Then the other one has a chance to say ‘no’”

- Three strategic retreats annually
- Knowledge sharing: emails, one-to-one meetings
- Whatsapp group for urgent issues only!

✓ Positive impact on work-life balance: “It is not only your own shoulders that you have, you have even eight other shoulders too!”

“I think trust is an important issue in shared leadership. I do not believe that we have to love each other but we have to respect each other and we have to have common ground, common objective and same or common understanding of how to further develop this university ...of what we are going to do and why [each of us] would like to contribute personal energy and time.”

- Rector Hanappi-Egger

DL is impactful in a dynamic, complex knowledge-based scenario for leveraging collective intelligence to tackle complicated issues

It can also be impactful in scenarios where resources are scarce or need to be shared

And can be used as a tool to engage followership (GenY) through focus and purpose

... aims to make groups more effective, efficient and agile by improving decision-making through leveraging knowledge/learning and by motivating followership by means of inclusion

Three main challenges

1. Inherently political nature of leadership within organizations and imbalances in the distribution of power and influence
 - Access to information, effective communication
 - Transparency i.e. clear articulation of goals
2. Lack of strength-based performance management
3. Mind-set

Questions to ask yourself

- Do we know how to work collaboratively?
- Do we reward team work?
- Is everyone clear about what we wish to achieve?
- What assumptions do we make in our team about our roles?



... Add your own questions here

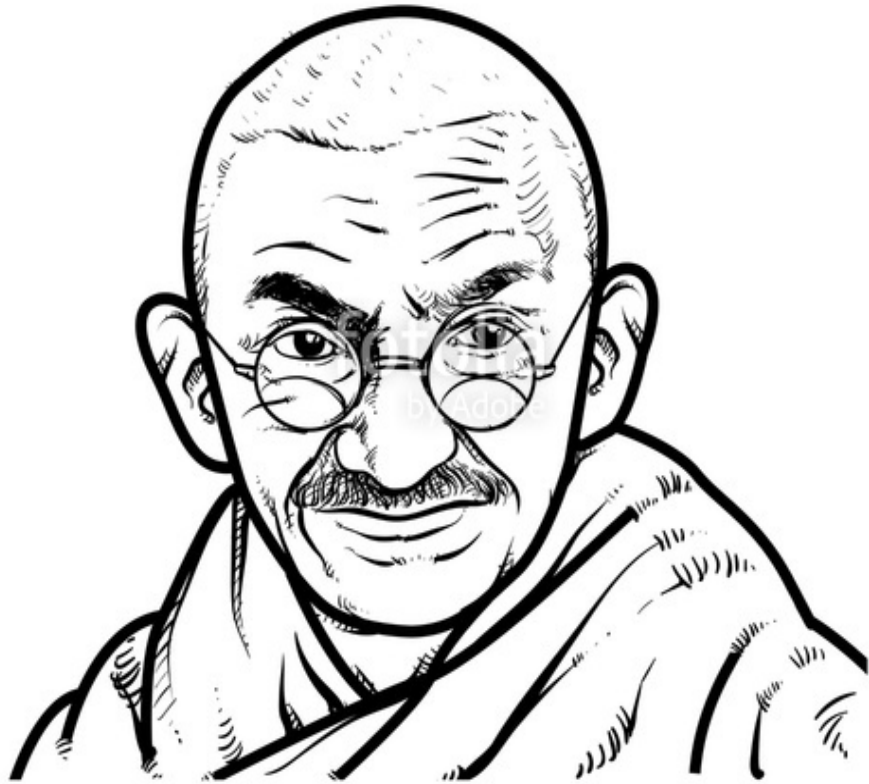
Final words . . .

The issue is not whether or not to facilitate/advocate vertical leadership.

Rather the issues are: (1) when is leadership most appropriately shared? (2) How does one develop shared leadership in a specific context? And (3) how does one utilize both vertical and shared leadership to leverage the capabilities of knowledge workers?

And also to what end do we discuss leadership? And what exactly do we wish to achieve?

DL is not for the faint hearted . . .



“There go my people. I must follow them, for I am their leader.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

Thank you for your attention

Please share your questions, thoughts, observations and stories!