

Distributed Leadership

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Leadership styles and philosophies come in many shapes and sizes and often are as unique as the leaders themselves. One such style, distributed leadership, also known as collaborative leadership, offers organizations the opportunity to truly work together as a community – from CEOs to frontline workers – in order to meet shared business goals.

Collaborative leaders seek to engage their employees in idea generation and decision-making processes. Their focus is on ‘sharing the wealth’ of power and leadership among all people in the organization. The result? A flexible organization that sees measurable changes in employee satisfaction and business success.

Traditional vs. Distributed Leadership

Traditional top-down leadership uses a hierarchical model to run the organization.

These leaders tend to

- hold onto power positions tightly
- keep high-level information within the executive team
- separate employees into working groups within their functional area (silos)
- make decisions behind closed doors

Distributed leadership turns this model inside out and asks the leaders of the organization to

- be authentic, transparent, trustworthy and willing to make decisions in groups
- recognize the value, talent and knowledge present in the employees
- proactively share this talent with the entire organization to foster innovation
- create new leaders at all levels by empowering employees to contribute
- implement systems to evaluate, recognize and reward collaborative efforts

Successful collaborative leaders are using these ideas to create trusting relationships with their entire staff. Decisions are now made and implemented quickly by groups of empowered employees and the company’s culture is transformed into a community working together towards the common goals.

Transitioning to a New Leadership Style

Organizational change brings both challenges and opportunities for the individuals and the whole. If you’re thinking of transitioning your organization to a distributed leadership model, know that it takes time and patience. It can be very intuitive for leaders who already possess the qualities described above but there could also be a steep learning curve for some leaders.

The collaborative process may seem unstructured and chaotic to some in comparison to a hierarchical model. It is critical that you develop clear structures to anchor your business processes and accurately set

expectations for your entire group. The hard work will pay off and the freedom you've created will allow creativity and teamwork to flourish in your collaborative organization.

Read More About Distributed Leadership (*and take a mini self-test*)

[Imagining the Future of Leadership](#), by Ancona and Backman

[Four Traits of Collaborative Leaders](#), by Tumin and Bratton

[Collaborative Leadership for Building Trust & Driving Business Results](#), by Stewart
Includes a mini self-test to evaluate if you're a collaborative leader