# Trend Watch: Redefining Leadership

It's time to let go of the heroic leader.

The ability of any single individual — as heroic or skilled or dedicated as he or she may be — is no longer enough to meet the complex challenges we face today.

"With the decline of the value of the heroic leader comes the rise of collective leadership," says Nick Petrie.

During a sabbatical year at Harvard, Petrie (now with CCL) undertook a wide-ranging study to explore *what the future of leadership development will look like*. One of the key trends he identified was the shift to collective leadership — what CCL describes as "interdependent leadership."

In his paper *Future Trends in Leadership Development*, Petrie explains:

"The complexity of our environment increasingly calls for collaboration between various stakeholders who each hold a different aspect of the reality — and many of whom must themselves adapt and grow if the problem is to be solved. These groups (which often cross geographies, reporting lines and organizations) need to share information, create plans, influence each other and make decisions."

If this trend has you thinking that we need to be sure managers have strong collaboration and influencing skills, you are missing a larger point, Petrie continues. "Individual competencies still matter. However, something more significant may be happening — the end of an era, dominated by individual leaders, and the beginning of another, which embraces *networks* of leadership."

Making the shift seems to require us to redefine leadership. Many organizational theorists have begun to reframe leadership, getting away from leadership as a person or role, to leadership as a *process*. Leadership can be enacted by anyone; it is not tied to a position of authority in the hierarchy or any one individual. Leadership can be distributed throughout networks of people and across boundaries and geographies. *Who* the leader is becomes less important than *what* is needed in the system and how *we* can produce it.

If leadership is thought of as a shared process, rather than an individual skill set, senior executives must learn new ways to help leadership develop broadly and collectively in their organizations. Collaborative, networked leadership is more likely to flourish when certain "conditions" support it, including:

- Open flows of information.
- Flexible hierarchies.
- Distributed resources.
- Distributed decision-making.
- Loosening of centralized controls.

To create these conditions, leadership development methods will have to address the collective mind-shift needed to enact leadership in a shared way. Leadership development practitioners will also need to create learning tools and strategies that mesh with the technology and social networking that has been rapidly flattening hierarchies and decentralizing control in recent years.

"We are still at the early stages of thinking about leadership development at a collective level," says Petrie. "But I have no doubt that future generations will see networked, interdependent leadership as a natural phenomenon, the way of the world."

---

**Leading Via Direction, Alignment, Commitment**

Interdependent leadership requires an evolution in leadership thought, according to CCL's John McGuire and Charles Palus. The journey begins with an outcome-based definition of leadership. Leadership is a social process that creates three essential outcomes: *shared direction, alignment and commitment (DAC)*.

"CCL has held DAC as its core definition of leadership for some time," says Nick Petrie. "With this understanding, the distinction between who is a leader and who is a follower becomes less clear or relevant. Everyone will be both at different times."

---

*Want to learn more? Download Future Trends in Leadership Development (http://www.ccl.org/leadership/pdf/research/futureTrends.pdf), a CCL white paper by Nicholas Petrie. You can also follow Nick on his blog about learning, growing and performing at www.nicholaspetrie.com.*