

**Guest Editors' Introduction****DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP FOR INTERCONNECTED  
WORLDS**

Niki Lambropoulos  
*Intelligensis Consultancy and  
London South Bank University  
London, UK*

Marianna Vivitsou  
*Department of Teacher Education  
University of Helsinki  
Finland*

The technological advancements in the second half of the previous century generated the potential for participatory decision making in organizational and governmental institutions. Moreover, the digital networking environments on the Internet that enabled this type of decision making were accompanied by the emergence and establishment of on-line communities. Under this perspective, the range of communication mediated by ubiquitous computing allows problems, ideas, and suggestions of a specific nature to be considered when gathered into organizational and institutional virtual spaces. Within these spaces, the voices of individual customers, workers, organizational stakeholders, and/or citizens can be articulated and brought to bear on services, practices, and policies, as well as to join voices with salient others. Such naturally or intentionally formed communities and groups require roles within them to function.

One of these roles is leadership; Chemers (1997), in his book titled, *An Integrative Theory Of Leadership*, suggested that leadership is the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. Although this approach of *one* leader directing a group was representative of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the new, globally interconnected context sets the stage for the expectation that leadership is to be less directive and more collaborative. The application of leadership attributes such as values, knowledge, and skills can now be found in and employed by the diversity of the group members and community rather than residing solely in just one, or just a few, individuals. Consequently, the communication that integrates the individuals within the collective allows for new attributes to be attached to the leadership construct. Thus, a new approach is being observed within the realms of cyberspace: distributed leadership.

The term *leadership* usually refers to the traditional top-down model of centralizing control. Recently, however, a transformational aspect has become embedded within the term to indicate a bottom-up management mode. Simultaneously, the paradigmatic shift in media-interactive

communication, enabled by the development of Web2.0 tools and environments, has enhanced connectivity and resulted in the growth of the networked experience. The intersection of these two transitions has created an environment that has empowered the user by offering the opportunity for interventionist action beyond the individual level. This perspective, therefore, generates the need for the study of bottom-up approaches to leadership on the one hand, and the need for reconsideration of the leadership concept, on the other. Such research would embrace the extending features of distribution—of creating, of planning, of work, and of leadership. Distributed leadership, then, builds upon participants' contributions in participatory decision making. Despite the fact that the capacity for leadership is both individual and collective (Ancona & Bresman, 2007; Senge, 1996), at the moment, methodologies and techniques addressing the issue of management exist for top-down and bottom-up approaches distinctively and exclusively. Distributed leadership, moreover, being a relatively new field, is also, to a certain extent, a largely unexplored one.

Distributed leadership (Woods, 2004) has been related to participatory decision making as well as to participatory democracy, while the concept is further enhanced by the myriad information and communication technologies (ICTs) and on-line networking technologies available today. According to Ghosh (2002), distributed leadership is a matter of a more purposeful resolve to build “multi-dimensional trust” within an organization. Examples come from media and computer companies, as well as educational and governmental organizations. More particularly, some program producers encourage viewers to vote on the plot, thereby influencing and/or determining the outcome of a film, series, or protagonists. Customers for some companies can make suggestions and vote on their ideas for products. Students' on-line communities in universities make suggestions to enhance policy-making decisions. From a European viewpoint, distributed leadership has been associated with shared visions across and beyond the boundaries of European countries, creating shared direction for all. The need for shared visions in Europe, as stressed by Costas Simitis in his 1997 speech at the London School of Economics, is based on the reality that democracy is in crisis. In fact, the European Union (EU) has made several attempts to involve the citizens in decision making by providing on-line discussion forums and tools to facilitate this process.<sup>1</sup> An attempt to aid in the financial crisis in Greece was introduced by the editors of the Ideas Platform,<sup>2</sup> where the users could submit their suggestions for solutions to related problems. The suggestions were then forwarded to the relevant Greek ministry as well as to the EU group associated with the Digital Agenda for Europe<sup>3</sup> organization.

Despite the growing applications of participatory decision making, the organizational structures to support the nonhierarchical nature of power and authority practices have not been widely studied yet. Furthermore, few studies have considered the incorporation of information systems into a business perspective for building direct ties and relationships that benefit from improved communication with customers or to reform public services. Under this perspective, it appears that the previous conceptualization, approaches, and practices of leadership can no longer be applied unquestioningly in our interconnected world. The leadership target of social influence by any means needs to be replaced by a more participatory approach focusing on the end result. In this millennium, focusing on group accomplishments and the well-being of the members represents the innovation not just in leadership, but also in project output. Social influence as a means for accomplishing task is expressed by the diversity of stakeholders, rather than in just one individual.

One approach that has provided a framework to understand, analyze, and function under this new leadership perspective is that of the empathic leader (Goleman, 2004). The empathic leader works as an instrument: He/she listens with empathy and then leads with empathy, as well as observes, asks questions, provides the means toward success, and gathers information to uncover the “true reality” of the group or community. The importance of empathic leadership, as advocated by Goleman, rests on three reasons: the increasing use of teams as “cauldrons of bubbling emotions,” the rapid pace of globalization with cross-cultural communication, and the growing need to retain talent. In considering the transition from the 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial revolution to the 21<sup>st</sup> century interconnected worlds, however, a discrepancy arises concerning the incorporation of the new leadership perspective within organizational and institutional practices when such an attempt is based upon existing theoretical frameworks.

Part of this knowledge gap then is bridged with this special issue of *Human Technology: An Interdisciplinary Journal on Humans in ICT Environments*. The four articles hosted in this issue focus on shared information, participation, and community-based dialogic forms of communication, and how these contribute to reshaping organizational, educational, and political practices.

Departing from the free movement principle that the open source culture supports, Kostakis, in the first article of this issue, explores the ways politics and democracies can benefit from the emerging participatory spirit that modern ICTs inspire. To meet this end, Kostakis sets out to provide a deeper insight into the nature, the effects, and the potential of the concept of wikipolitics for a revitalized democratic discourse. In his discussion of the ways networked environments allow for a reorganization of economic, cultural, and political life, the author also uncovers several problems underlying the open source approach. Kostakis concludes the present study by proposing that a law-abiding clear social community contract, a user-friendly architecture with natural narrative conversational modes of human interaction, and a change in the attitude of both politicians and citizens are some of the measures a scientifically designed wikipolitics project could take in order to rule out threats.

The conversational mode of interaction occurring in open source environments is, in fact, the departure point of the study conducted by Barberio, Mastrogiorgio and Lomi. To balance excessive research attention on the technical part, Barberio and colleagues follow an anthropocentric approach to investigate communication patterns that develop in order to meet discussion objectives. To this end, the researchers examine communication practices evolving among the members of a virtual community, gaining insight into dialogic forms of coordination. As the findings of their study indicate, communication practices provide a lens for looking at discussion coordination in a concrete way. Through communication genres already in use, cognitive complexity is reduced, a phenomenon that, as the authors underscore, also applies to collective decision making. The authors conclude that the potential of new Internet technologies to enhance dialogic-cooperative forms of coordination needs to be further explored.

Considering the potential for organizational innovation being the backbone of her studies, Jameson argues for distributed leadership as an effective model of operation within on-line communities. To support her case, the researcher draws upon the findings resulting from the operationalization of three case studies situated in an on-line global community. Through her analysis, Jameson pinpoints that an effective model of distributed leadership enhances active participation and enables community members to potentially become involved in on-line

community leadership. To meet this end, a balance between the visibility and invisibility of formal leadership presence in community discussions is essential. Reflecting upon her study findings, Jameson goes on to argue for the need of socioemotional trust to develop as one of the fundamental qualities towards the articulation of genuine dialogue between team members at all organizational levels. By alternating instances of presence and collaborative discretion, therefore, on-line community leaders pass the floor to other members, thus contributing to balanced group interactions and allowing for the distribution of democratic procedures.

Finally, the view of distributed leadership taken by Lambropoulos, Gourdin and Bakharia in their work situates the issue in the educational domain. In their paper, Lambropoulos and colleagues discuss and analyze the collaborative efforts of students participating in a distributed leadership course, implemented on-line and aimed at correlating interaction quality with idea generation. Scripting computer-supported collaborative e-learning activities based on distributed leadership principles, the authors claim, can scaffold students' interactions. In this way, collaboration is supported and idea generation promoted. The associated tools play their own part to collaboration enhancement, as scripting brings students' interactions and dialogical sequences to the fore, thus contributing to an improved learner awareness. Aiming towards data validation, the researchers apply a number of diverse methods and tools to provide a multifaceted approach so as to achieve a more holistic view of the data and their interpretation.

This special issue focuses on current trends and practices, as well as real-life case studies, where evaluations have been applied and validated. As a result, this issue not only reports first experiences and debates, it also manages to go beyond the current state of the art by looking into future prospects and emerging applications. As such, this special issue can be a useful guide and reference tool to practitioners and experts who study, design, construct, moderate, evaluate and maintain distributed leadership environments and techniques in e-learning, e-business, e-government, and other related domains. By stressing the individual's responsibility to be engaged actively in any group, the social or even national accomplishment, and the leader's duty to listen and respond, this special issue raises leadership to a new level, this of distributed leadership.

## ENDNOTE

1. See, for example, the Interactive Policy-Making Tool (<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/ipm>), which aims to improve governance by using the Internet to collect and analyze reactions of citizens and enterprises, evaluate existing EU policies, and facilitate open consultations on new initiatives.
2. This initiative can be seen at <http://democracyreloaded.gr>
3. The link to the Digital Agenda for Europe is [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/digital-agenda/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/digital-agenda/index_en.htm)

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## Authors’ Note

All correspondence should be addressed to:  
Dr. Niki Lambropoulos  
Intelligence Consultancy  
1 Dale Grove, London, N12 8EE UK  
[niki@intelligence.eu](mailto:niki@intelligence.eu) and [nikilambropoulos@gmail.com](mailto:nikilambropoulos@gmail.com)

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*Human Technology: An Interdisciplinary Journal on Humans in ICT Environments*  
ISSN 1795-6889  
[www.humantechnology.jyu.fi](http://www.humantechnology.jyu.fi)