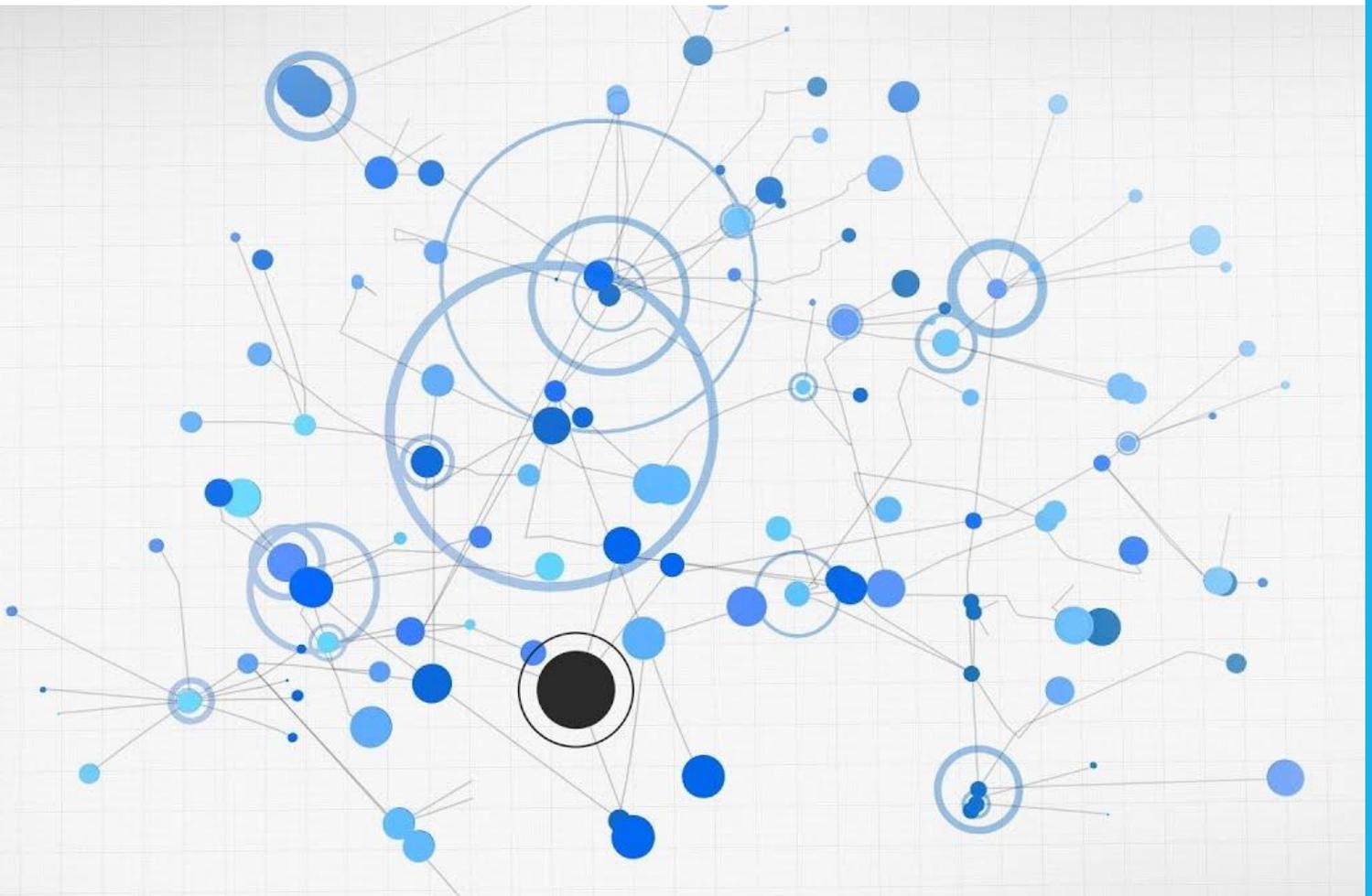




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# **Leadership in the Information Age**

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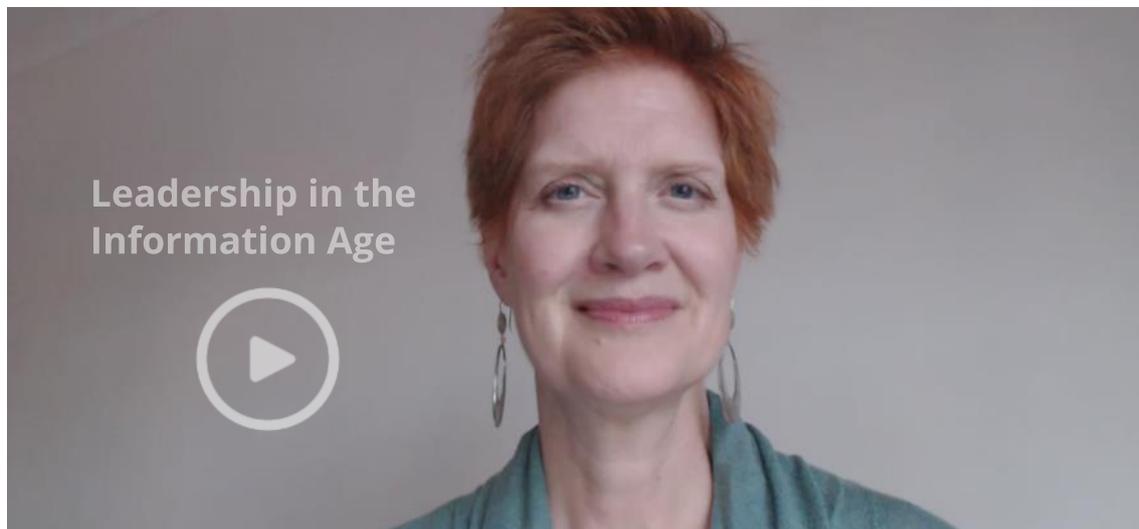


## Work relationships in the Information Age

How have work relationships changed with the Internet?

**The access to data impacts how people interact...and therefore the skills required to succeed in the professional environment.**

View this 3-minute video for an summary of this report.



## Relationship Revolution: From Cave Age through the Industrial Age

Way back when, when Man ventured out of the cave to hunt and Woman gathered nuts, **skills to survive** included sensing danger, strength & speed, and managing the fire.

Along came farming and its partner, commerce. Signs of success still included strength. (That plow still needed pushing. The hours are loooooong.) Negotiation skills such as arithmetic, communication, ability to compromise, and product presentation grew in importance.

With the Industrial Revolution, work relationships reformed again. Like production flow, people were expected to act predictably. Efficient meant “doing the same thing, faster.” If one person was absent another could easily replace him.

**Management grew as a need to coordinate and keep employees in line and to transfer data from the people doing the work to those making decisions.**



“Don’t rock the boat.” “Follow the party line.” “Show who’s in charge.” Reflect the mentality of success through predictability and control.

## The Information Age

**Then came the Internet and smart phones.**

Information is everywhere. Corporate hierarchies adapted, eliminating levels of mid-management, instituting matrix organizational structures and project teams. Whereas each person used to have few and regular colleagues with clearly defined roles, **they now interact in ever-changing networks.**



Consider the medical field. Surgeons who previously operated with dedicated nursing teams now collaborate with different specialists across the globe depending upon the operation. When working with intricate and specialized instruments, the technicians have more knowledge in some areas than the doctors. The clear hierarchy that met needs of a generation ago no longer assures success today. Power no longer lies in the few people at the top; it is spread throughout the network.

Our language has evolved to reflect what we now prize: “Disruptive innovation,” “Diversity,” “Glocal (simultaneously global and local)”

**The skills to thrive in this new context are those that strengthn collaboration in every-changing networks: social and communication skills, adaptability, seeking to understand, autonomy, and more.**

**How have leadership styles adapted to these new relationship norms and needs?**



## Traditional Leadership Styles

In her TedTalk at London Business School, Professor Herminia Ibarra talks about “What got you HERE won’t get you THERE.”



What were the leadership styles that brought success until now? Traditionally managers focused on either **top-down (results first) or people first strategies**.

### TOP-DOWN COMMANDING STYLE

Clear directives, efficient instruction-giving, and rational results orientation characterize this authoritative style. These are all good things. At the same time, there is little room for creativity and autonomy. **Companies struggle with the negative consequences of commanding leadership: employee disengagement, lack of initiative-taking, and the expense of high turnover especially among the younger generations.**

### PEOPLE-PLEASING FOCUS

That's when companies and managers focus on kinder, employee satisfaction efforts. Mindfulness, yoga, and free food abound. And yet, a company's viability still depends upon its ability to satisfy client needs. **A concentration on building harmony and emotional bonds among employees slows down decision-making.** Progress is sluggish.



## THE LEADERSHIP STYLE DANCE

Often, managers jiggle between these two styles. They focus on results and give directives until they need to boost team motivation and collaboration. They inject people-development efforts and get frustrated when performance flounders.

**Neither commanding nor affiliating leadership styles build the skills to prosper in the Information Age.**



## Democratic Leadership

What if one could garner the benefits of both performance and people orientation without experiencing the drawbacks? It might sound like magic, and yet research has proven that it works...and that it takes work!

### FIRM AND KIND

Democratic Leaders are **simultaneously firm and kind**. In their daily interaction with their teams they **both** focus on the business requirement of securing results **and** on the team members' needs to belong and to contribute.

Instead of juggling between a focus on performance then on people and back, these leaders communicate constructively through tools that respect **both the manager and the team members at the same time**. These practices **build collaboration, even among very diverse groups, stimulate creativity, and secure engagement**. These are the capabilities that help companies prosper in our times.



## An Example with Managers

Here is an example of democratic leaderships from my paradigm-changing workshops.

I often begin a training session inviting managers into small groups and to brainstorm the motivational tools that they currently use. They list one tool per post-it note. The room hums with the music of satisfied voices expressing how they boost

- Promotion opportunities
- Bonus
- Raise
- Training
- Company car
- Health insurance
- Latest phone technology
- Yoga
- Stretch projects
- Team outings
- .....

Then I invite these managers to arrange the post-it notes according to categories:

- ⇒ Reward
- ⇒ Punishment
- ⇒ Encouragement
- ⇒ Empowering
- ⇒ Skill-Building
- ⇒ Teamwork ...

After a short, thoughtful silence, participants paste post-its and the room buzzes with questions and comments like, *“Who needs encouragement?”* and, *“We reward our guys more than you do yours!”* ...

**Managers step back** and look at the series of posters. It’s an *“Aha!”* moment.

### Toolbox Inventory

- Discovery
- Taking Initiative

Leaders list current motivational tools and classify them by category.

Rewards (12)	Teamwork (2)	Encouragement (0)

Participant's response, *“Aha! I'm missing motivational opportunities AND I want to build teamwork and taking*

The “Reward” poster is filled with tools. “Skill-Building” and “Teamwork” welcomes a few. “Encouragement” usually remains pretty blank.



At a glance (and without a tiresome discourse) managers realize

- They are concentrating motivational tools in limited categories
- They are missing out on motivational opportunities
- Their motivational efforts might not be building the skills these managers seek to build in their teams!

## DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP CHANGES MINDSETS

I could have begun the workshops by telling participants that their motivational practices are narrow and counter-productive. (It's the conclusion many managers come to make.) It is a firm statement and not necessarily unkind. It is judgmental. This stance usually results in defensiveness, crossed arms (dis-engaged body language), or reticence to learn.

The above activity or learning tool challenges leaders' mindsets in a simultaneously firm and kind manner. It's firm because the structure is clear. It is kind because it allows for creative listening and self-discovery fosters commitment to change. This exercise stimulates learning without hamoring in information.

"I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail." – Abraham Maslow

## DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP UNITES TEAMS

This same activity can be used by leaders with their teams when it's time to change strategies.

Consider the sales manager who realizes his team could build more lasting sales and profitability through partnerships. Some of his "best salespeople" focus on volume and they sell on promotion.

The low-cost strategy that got the top salesperson high volumes ("Here") will not help him build healthier margins (reach "There").

The team leader could present his conclusion to the group. *"We're doing too many promotions. We need to build partnerships."* It took a few seconds to make the announcement. Isn't it effective?



Yet, you and I know that those top salespeople are devising their my-client-is-different argumentation to present to the boss. Getting the team behind his plan ends up becoming a hugely time-consuming operation. Seconds to make the announcement + hours in one-on-one discussions to secure buy-in to *his* plan.



What if the manager called together a group meeting and had each salesperson write on post-it the terms secured for each client (price discounts, flexible financing packages, customer service...) Then the team members arrange their post-it notes according to the manager's selected categories (Purchase price, Delivery conditions, Payment terms, Service benefits...)

When the team steps back, they visualize their sales practices, the healthy and the unsustainable ones. They might not like seeing the facts presented in this manner. But they recognize they have a responsibility in the situation and in finding a solution. It's a team concern, not merely the boss's issue. They arrived at the conclusion on their own, without it being imposed from top down.

## From Theory to Action

Recall the OK Google advertising. A man inquires, "OK Google, get me a recipe for cupcakes."

Later, the man, covered in flour asks, "OK Google. Who delivers cupcakes at this hour?"

The **recipe provided "how-to." He needed "know-how".**



Democratic Leadership is not as simple to learn as one might believe.

- Many managers believe they already lead by cooperation and mutual respect. *"Other people need to learn these principles. Not me."* Their teams might think differently...!
- Most of us do not challenge the assumptions which influence our behaviors. Does the fish think about water? We are not aware of our blind spots.

Relationship experts such as Professor Brené Brown, Professor at University of Houston, and Dr. Jane Nelsen, founder of Positive Discipline, have developed paradigm-shifting activities which uncover people's assumptions and help them review their beliefs.

That's how I lead my trainings. Through experiential activities such as the Motivational Toolbox described above, I invite managers to examine issues from multiple (and new) perspectives. Together, in a culture of trust which I model throughout the workshop, we explore the links between the visible leadership behaviors and the values and mindset from which they evolve.



These exercises put words to the thinking that "brought them HERE" and to the frustrations they meet in not being able to reach "THERE" with the same methods.

According to Abraham Maslow, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail."



Through small group brainstorming, learning games, and role plays, managers expand their repertoire of relationship-building tools and techniques to build

- A culture of trust
- Learning from mistakes
- Engagement from teams
- Effective follow through on commitments
- Committed teamwork
- and more

Once leaders have experienced their “Aha” moments from these science-inspired activities, we explore ways to apply them within their teams. Managers are armed with firm AND kind, performance-oriented AND people-developing tools to transmit values throughout the organization while reaching stretch results.

Have questions about Democratic Leadership, leading employees who surpass you in expertise, or creating teamwork to stimulate performance? Contact me.

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