

Leadership is fundamentally about using pooled resources to achieve some purpose. The narrative behind traditional organizational leadership goes something like this:

Historical Organizational Leadership Narrative

We want to accomplish something too complex for any one of us to do alone

- ↳ so we create a structure (e.g. corporation) to coordinate and control allocation of resources (time, money, talent, etc.) to ensure the job gets done
 - ↳ we give authority to a “boss” to oversee the structure by...
 - ↳ ...making the decisions
 - ↳ ...controlling resources and events
 - ↳ ...motivating people (typically with money, opportunity, fear, guilt, pride)

That approach has served us well for several generations. But as has oft been said, “what got us here won’t get us there”. The speed of change, technological advances, the complexity of global problems, and the values embraced by our culture are a few of the reasons why leadership itself is changing. Emerging approaches to leadership would not likely have worked a couple of decades ago, and historical leadership won’t serve us well in the future.

Today’s emerging organizational leadership narrative looks more like this:

Emerging Organizational Leadership Narrative

We want to accomplish something too complex for any one of us to do alone

- ↳ so we find and collaborate with other people who share a passion for that cause
 - ↳ we identify leaders from among us who are skilled at...
 - ↳ ...facilitating collaborative decision making and vision casting
 - ↳ ...leveraging each person’s knowledge and skills to accomplish what needs done regardless of defined roles
 - ↳ ...networking participants to identify obstacles and find solutions
 - ↳ ...motivating by connecting to the intrinsic values of each person

While baby boomers tended to accept the institutions we inherited from our parents, this generation is learning to leverage networks to get complex things done. Both generations share some values – meaningful work, independence, flexibility, good income – but in the past we accepted that those values were limited by necessary, immovable institutional constraints. Today’s leaders view the *values as immovable* and are forcing the *institutions to give way* to values-compatible means to get results.

The old-school philosophy said that someone had to be “in charge” to avoid anarchy or at least inefficiency. The rising generation of leaders is proving that with the right shared vision and values, leadership can thrive by influencing a network rather than by institutional, power-based authority.

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