



ReThink
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A RIPPEL INITIATIVE

for assessing Your Distributed Leadership Practice

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Assessing Your Distributed Leadership Practice

In regions where diverse stakeholders are working together to transform the ecosystem that produces health and well-being, an effective distributed leadership practice is needed to guide that change. This tool will help you and your fellow stewards—the people and organizations responsible for working with others to transform health and well-being across your region—identify strengths and weaknesses in your current leadership efforts so you can move more intentionally toward the distributed leadership practice you will need.

What is a distributed leadership?

Practicing distributed leadership means having a governance structure in which leadership is shared among many players. Health ecosystems are complex, and transforming an ecosystem at the regional level requires more work than any one leader or institution can do effectively. It requires collaboration and shared stewardship of a common system. Effective distributed governance structures:

- Achieve collective purposes over time;
- Adapt as regional contexts and needs change; and
- Engage a broad representation of stakeholders, including residents, so all voices have an impact.

This tool invites you to work with your fellow regional stewards to assess and enhance your distributed leadership practice. It is organized around four questions that will help you determine how broadly and effectively you are distributing leadership as you seek to transform your regional health system.

- 1. Who is the “we” involved in leadership?** Governance structures that support distributed leadership ensure:
 - Every steward serving a leadership function has a clear and distinct purpose and the authority to carry it out;
 - Stewards are networked in close relationship with one another; and
 - Stewards’ roles are bounded, meaning they are clearly communicated so all have a shared understanding of their individual and collective work, including who they serve.
- 2. Who makes decisions?** Effective decision making is essential to good governance. Stewards who do this well distribute decision-making roles, progressively building on existing efforts in the region. Decision-making bodies are intentionally made up of diverse voices, including those of the people most affected by the decisions being made.
- 3. Why should fellow stewards and other citizens, including residents, trust these bodies to lead for the whole region?** Leaders must earn the trust of the people they are serving in their regions. Their legitimacy comes from being selected by those they serve, meaning their fellow stewards delegate to them the authority to make decisions, resolve disputes, and implement solutions on their behalf. To be seen as legitimate, these leaders among leaders must consistently adapt the distributed governance structure to meet the needs of the region, not their own independent organizational interests.
- 4. How can leaders ensure that their distributed governance structure works and stays functional over a long period of time?** Good governance structures are fit for the purpose and context, reflective of the population and appropriate for the geographic scope and range of the effort. There are accountability systems in place to monitor their efficacy over time.

Instructions

OBJECTIVE: This tool offers criteria to help you and your fellow stewards evaluate how much and how effectively you are distributing leadership through well-designed governance structures so you can identify strengths and areas for improvement.

TIME: This exercise should take roughly 90 minutes in a small group, including time for individual work and discussion.

MATERIALS:

- Copies of the worksheet on page 4 for each participant, plus one additional
- Optional: A single copy of the spider diagram on page 5; you may choose to blow up the spider diagram to a larger poster size so that it can be more easily seen by the group
- Pens and paper

PARTICIPANTS: You will find the exercise most useful if you are able to gather stewards who represent the many sectors that affect health in your region and who play some role in the governance and management of your regional effort.

Directions

1. Prior to beginning, identify a facilitator to guide participants through the exercise.
2. At the outset of the meeting (:15): With all participants, ensure there is a common understanding about how your current governance structures are designed (even if informal, this baseline understanding will be helpful as you move through the exercise).
Be sure to cover these four questions:
 - a. Who is currently involved in leadership in your region?
 - b. Who makes decisions?
 - c. Do others in the region trust you to act on their behalf—and if so, why?
 - d. What measures have you taken to ensure that your current structure remains agile and responsive over time?
3. Individually (:15): Using the worksheet on page 4, consider how well your governance structure meets the assessment criteria. Record any strengths or weaknesses in the structure, and rate how well you and your fellow stewards are collectively addressing the criteria on a scale of 0 to 10 (weak to strong).
4. As a group (:20):
 - a. Each participant should report their ratings and their reasoning behind them. Identify and discuss discrepancies in ratings across the group, capturing the reasoning behind each person's rating. Reach consensus on ratings for each of the criteria, using a new version of the worksheet to record your collective decisions.
 - b. Optional (if you need a visual aid): Using the spider diagram on page 5, draw a dot on the corresponding line for each criteria. For example, if your group rated how networked your governance is as a 5, draw a dot on the fifth line from the center of the spider web. Once you have drawn dots for each criterion, connect them with lines to form a circular shape. The resulting diagram should help you visualize areas where the current governance structure is strongest and weakest.
5. As a group (:40): Debrief on the results of the assessment, identifying strengths of the overall governance structure and areas for improvement. Use the following questions to prompt further conversation:
 - a. What would a stronger and more successful governance structure that supports your distributed leadership practice look like?
 - b. What challenges are there in designing and implementing such a structure?
 - c. What will it take to successfully address those challenges?
 - d. What actions are needed to achieve this?

Distributed Leadership Practice Assessment

Name: _____ Partnership/Organization: _____

0 = WEAK
10 = STRONG
(or unknown)

	Criteria	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses	Rating
Who is the “we” involved in leadership?	Distinct	All stewards (people or organizations, including multisector partnerships) that are part of the governance structure have distinct purposes and authorities that are clear to all participants.			
	Networked	All stewards in the region that are engaged in health system transformation have explicit links between them.			
	Bounded	It is clear what the geographic scope of the region is, what beneficiaries the network serves, and who the players are in the health ecosystem.			
Who makes decisions?	Distributed	The responsibility for leadership involves a broad and intentional array of stewards.			
	Progressive	The design of the governance structure builds on existing groups before inventing new ones.			
	Inclusive	Those affected by the rules/decisions participate in shaping or modifying the rules/decisions.			
Why should fellow stewards and other citizens, including residents, trust these bodies to lead for the whole region?	Authoritative	Stewards grant authority to a leadership team to make decisions on their behalf, resolve disputes among parties, implement solutions, and invest resources.			
	Adaptive	The governance structure evolves to fit current needs rather than protecting the existence of individual organizations or institutions.			
How can leaders ensure that their distributed governance structure works and stays functional over a long period of time?	Fit for purpose and context	The governance structure is appropriately complex for the size of the population, geographic scope, and range of the effort.			
	Accountable	There is a system, carried out by participating stewards, for monitoring effectiveness.			

Distributed Leadership Practice Assessment (continued)

