

Living Lab Case Study: Practicing Non-hierarchical Leadership Models

Our project team initially started out using a non-hierarchical leadership model which took the dismantling of hierarchies to an extreme: everyone had a say in every decision and no single person had the authority to sign tasks off. While this meant that everyone had shared responsibilities and an equal stake in the project, it also came with challenges:

- Expectations of team members did not match pay and grade
- Team had to digest large amounts of information regularly
- Slow decision-making led to project delays
- No one had the final authority to make decisions

So we moved to a distributed leadership model which allows us to question who holds power and why. It thrives on trust and promotes creativity, innovation and a broader perspective. This model:

- Provides opportunities for leadership without a formal role
- Task distribution recognises individuals' skills and experience
- Only key decisions require full team consensus
- Project leadership team still holds the overarching responsibility for tasks getting completed



In practice, it looks like individuals taking ownership of their own pieces of work and being trusted to make decisions independently, while making sure everyone's voice is heard on the key decisions and having some final point of responsibility to make sure things move forward.

When we changed our leadership model, we learned that not all hierarchies are bad - in fact, some are necessary to having an effective team. To find the right way of working, where everyone feels valued and is progressing, we have needed to be open and transparent. We've needed to try things and admit when they are not working. But we've been all the stronger for it and have found an equity that works for us.