

MIT

Leadership Center

Passion to Action Newsletter

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Collective Intelligence: Technology enables new ways of organizing to solve societal challenges.

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Collective Intelligence



Distributed leadership poses challenges for collective thinking

Harnessing MIT's expertise in computer and brain sciences, leadership and management, a new MIT Sloan School of Management initiative is shaping how groups of people and enterprises – enabled by smart technology – can come together in ways not possible before to address and solve significant political, economic and societal challenges.

The newly named [Center for Collective Intelligence \(CCI\)](#) is directed by [Thomas Malone](#), a member of the MIT Leadership Center faculty and the Patrick J. McGovern Professor of Management, and builds on Malone's research featured in his book, [The Future of Work](#).

The Future of Work examined how technology transformed organizations, according to Malone. "We now are looking at what comes next – to see how technology actually frees and enables us to organize in ways never before possible to be more adaptive, efficient and innovative."

CCI and the [MIT Leadership Center](#) will be working closely together, says [Deborah Ancona](#), Faculty Director of the MIT Leadership Center and the Seley Distinguished Professor of Management. "The challenge for collective intelligence is how best to create collective leadership. Having people dispersed around the globe, connected virtually and working collectively, means that responsibility and initiative must be more widely distributed than ever before.

"The single, omniscient leader with all the answers is a myth. As we move away from centralized command and control to [leadership at all levels](#)," Ancona says, "we need to learn more about how to create, connect and align the multiple leadership initiatives needed to operate in a competitive, complex and distributed world."

"Most ideas on how to address industry and societal challenges are based on traditional hierarchical approaches that were successful in the 20th century," Malone adds. "Today, cheap communication and smart technology give us the ability to organize in ways never before imagined to solve problems. For example, eBay and Wikipedia, both forms of 'collective intelligence,' address retailing and writing encyclopedias in dramatically different ways than Walmart and Britannica respectively."

CCI involves faculty from across MIT, including the MIT Leadership Center, MIT Sloan School of Management, Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, Media Laboratory, Brain and Cognitive Sciences Department, and the McGovern Institute for Brain Research. With its combination of expertise in emerging technologies and the latest thinking in organizational effectiveness, management and leadership, MIT is uniquely suited to examine current ventures like

Google and Wikipedia, as well as engineer and test new ventures that can, for example, harness the intelligence of thousands of people around the world to develop solutions to global climate change.

“Creating new examples of collective intelligence,” Malone adds, “requires just as much attention to designing human networks, cultures and connections as it does to engineering technology networks. A primary application of our work will be to use these new information technologies to solve old problems in new ways.”

[Read more about the new world of work.](#)

Measuring Up



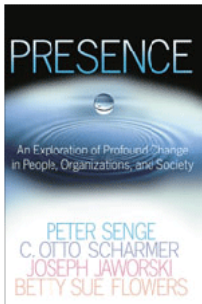
Never measure against budget, urges Jack Welch. At GE, “we knew there were two things to measure against: How well the competition did. How well we did against last year. Nothing else counts,” says Welch, former GE Chairman and CEO.

A leader’s role, Welch says, is to impart vision and a healthy corporate culture, build great people and great teams, and show them how to lead. [Watch the video](#) of Welch’s conversation with MIT Sloan Dean Richard Schmalensee and Alex d’Arbeloff, former Chairman of the MIT Corporation.

One of several renowned executives teaching at MIT Sloan, Welch is currently offering an MBA course, “Conversations with Jack Welch,” that draws on his writings and his experience leading and teaching at GE.

[Watch the video ...](#)

Mindful Change



A new way of seeing. Openness to seeing, sensing, and realizing new possibilities underpins *Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society*.

In *Presence*, four leading thinkers on management and change encourage us to understand more deeply the dynamic nature of the world and our part in creating future realities. The authors, who include MIT senior lecturers Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer, show how important it is to look at whole organizations and to be attuned to the ever-changing nature of individuals, institutions, and society.

[One reviewer wrote](#), “In *Presence*, the examples are fresh, the conclusions accurate, and the challenges profound. The book allows readers to begin a journey that starts introspectively and moves into global awareness.”

Another reviewer praised *Presence*’s “forays into philosophical thinking and developments in scientific theory.”

[Read reviews of Presence.](#)

Leading by Responding



“Sometimes not doing things is a way of leading,” says Dr. Frannie Léautier, Vice President at the World Bank and an expert in infrastructure strategy formulation in developing countries. Léautier has learned that for development projects that involve political, scientific, environmental, financial, and social pressures, appropriate reactions—not just getting ahead of events—are good leadership.

Léautier, born in Tanzania, described the challenges of [leading across cultural boundaries](#) at the launch of the MIT Leadership Center, now available on video.

Later this month, Léautier will lead a role play negotiation on the construction of [the world's 11th-longest bridge](#). During MIT's [Sloan Innovation Period](#), students will grapple with the competing interests of economic development, political interests, and ancestral rights, struggling to decide what a leader must do when a situation has no clear win-win.

[Watch the video ...](#)

MIT Leadership Center

The MIT Leadership Center is dedicated to advancing the knowledge, perspectives and experiences that enable leaders to transform their passion into action and improve the world. The Center's world-class researchers and practitioners create cutting-edge theory and applied research, pragmatic tools for action, innovative education, and dialogues and networks to connect diverse individuals, organizations and communities around the globe. [Read past issues of our newsletter.](#)

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