

Praise for *The Collaborative Leader*

The benefits of collaboration to leaders in the private, public and voluntary sectors are beyond doubt. In this world of increasing complexity, leaders are frequently required to work across conventional boundaries to achieve their objectives. This almost inevitably requires leaders to have the capability to collaborate effectively. In this work McDermott and Hall set out to demystify the art of collaboration and provide a methodology for leaders to achieve excellence in its application. The book also addresses the negative side of failed collaborative ventures and analyzes the principle causes. A must-read for aspiring leaders and everyone grappling with complex change.

**Martin Roberts PhD, author of
*Change Management Excellence***

In business, collaborative leadership is becoming an essential skill and principle ... and yet it is often misunderstood, with frustrating results. In *The Collaborative Leader*, the authors give you plenty of thought-provoking questions, examples and models to help you walk the sometimes less than easy path of true collaboration.

Joe Cheal, leadership development specialist and author

Ian and Michael have been great thinkers and creators of quality information for the field of NLP for many years and their latest effort is certainly something special. Collaborative leadership, for most writers, is like trying to organize smoke. Ian and Michael have managed to be systematic, carefully specific (where most have failed), and even pragmatic in this effort to help us all understand, and actually learn how to use, the wonderful and valuable systems of collaboration. I really appreciate their careful explanation that leaders must make sure that their own preconceptions and habits are fully understood and sometimes changed. So, here we have critically important skill sets, presented at the right time in our ongoing effort to help organizations and teams move toward excellence. They have professionally identified principles and skills in a way that is pragmatic enough to be incredibly useful. Right information, right time, right presenters. It doesn't get better. Get the book and find out for yourself what a sterling job these two men have done, again.

**R. Frank Pucelik, Pucelik Consulting Group,
INLPTA, and ANLP**

the collaborative leader

The ultimate leadership challenge

Ian McDermott and L. Michael Hall PhD



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Preface

Behind all the current buzz about collaboration is a discipline. And with all due respect to the ancient arts of governing and diplomacy, the more recent art of collaboration does represent something new—maybe Copernican. If it contained a silicon chip, we'd all be excited.

John Gardner

Creative collaboration is now possible on an unprecedented scale, by people based all over the world.

Warren Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader* (2003)

Collaboration is co-laboring, literally “laboring with” others. Given this, it is only natural that a book on collaboration should be written collaboratively by more than one author. That’s precisely what we have done in this book.

Both of us have engaged in many collaborations over the years and we ascribe much of our personal success to working with others—collaborating. We are also both seasoned writers as well as leaders in our own areas. Did we have time to collaborate and write another book? No, but we made time because this really matters to us, which is true of many collaborations.

When we began there was another person involved in this project—Shelle Rose Charvet. Actually, she was the one who originally brought us together and the three of us worked on this project jointly. But then “life happens” and Shelle realized she had taken on too much and needed to focus on her new business. She said that “for my own well-being I need to cut back on my commitments.” So she chose to step out of the project. This made us aware of an important aspect of collaboration: Collaborations inevitably grow, change, and evolve as people, situations, and needs shift over time.

As our experience with Shelle makes clear, collaboration is a rich and dynamic process between people; it is a living, evolving experience. It is not a rigid set of roles or rules about how to do something. It is an act and experience of creativity wherein a few, or many,

people discover how to interact in such a way that new emergent ideas arise; ideas which, when put into action, can bring forth new and wonderful innovations.

“Can You Give Me the ‘TED Version’ of This Book?”

While we identified a great many facets of collaboration in our initial inquiry phase, when we began writing this book, we shifted our focus to a singular question: What do we feel passionate about regarding collaboration that would make this book unique and transformative for the lives of those who read it?

In this book we have answered that question by focusing on three main considerations about collaboration and leadership:

1. What is collaboration?
2. How does it relate to leadership?
3. How do you do it effectively?

First, what is collaboration? Collaboration is the demanding business of working together to get things done in order to get practical results. It builds businesses, makes money, and launches pragmatic solutions into the world. As we show you how this works, you will see how it can give you an edge in your leadership.

Second, how does collaboration relate to leadership? Collaboration requires leadership. It needs a person (or team) to bring people together and enable them to work effectively as one. Inspiring and administering a collaborative partnership brings out the best in them. As we explain how to do this, you will learn lots of collaborative leadership skills.

Third, how do you do collaboration effectively? Collaboration necessitates skills. It requires a set of core competencies that enable people to work together effectively to achieve what none could accomplish alone or apart. As you develop these qualities, you will take your leadership skills to a whole new level.

We have found that there are many misconceptions about collaboration. One of the most common is that collaboration is a nice idea about people getting along and feeling good about each other, but it doesn't improve the bottom line. Another myth is that collaboration requires a mediator, not a leader, because it involves getting people to compromise. There are many more. Such myths obscure the fact that collaboration actually gives businesses a competitive advantage

and can deliver a real return on investment. All truly great organizations are great because of collaboration. We call these misconceptions *collaboration myths*.

Our contention is that a great deal of collaboration is hidden in plain sight and its importance is often unrecognized and unappreciated. Without some degree of implicit collaboration, it's almost impossible to get much done at all. We believe this has huge implications for anyone in leadership. As you will discover, the fact is that collaboration involves a set of core competencies that are, in effect, leadership competencies. These can be learned and improved.

This also highlights another hidden truth: The ability to collaborate is the ultimate leadership skill. And that's what our world is increasingly demanding—collaborative leaders. Therefore, promoting collaboration as a skill set is the next great step in leadership development. So, we have written this book to make explicit what collaborative leadership is and how to become that kind and quality of leader.

What Will You Get From This Book?

There are many benefits to be gained. First of all, a practical approach to developing high level collaboration skills. Instead of focusing on the theories behind collaboration, we have designed *The Collaborative Leader* to be a guide for how to collaborate with others and how to be a collaborative leader. This means learning how to win the hearts and minds of those you lead. Only then will people participate in a collaborative vision with you. You will find assessment questions throughout, step-by-step processes on collaboration, and an invitation to action at the end of each chapter under the title, “Your Next Steps In Being a Collaborative Leader.”

Second, practical and immediate things to do. We have organized the book so you can immediately begin testing the usefulness of the ideas—perhaps even turnaround a non-collaborative group or environment.

Third, a personal challenge to step up to the collaborative level of leadership. To lead others is to steer them to work together and to combine their intellectual and relational capital. As a leader you lead them to collaborate. That's why the leader who cannot effectively collaborate cannot effectively lead. If you are to walk your talk, you need to demonstrate collaborative skills yourself.

Fourth, a model of the structure of collaboration. We come from a field that specializes in modeling expertise and excellence—neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). We began our own collaboration by unpacking (i.e., modeling) examples of collaboration—what made them work, what the challenges were, how collaborators dealt with barriers to collaboration, the beliefs and values of the collaborators, and much more. By the end of this book, you will have a thorough understanding of the structure and processes of collaboration.

Fifth, a guide to the set of competencies that facilitate a healthy, joyful, and productive collaboration. One of the things we discovered in the process of studying collaboration is that the best collaborators are those individuals who have lots of fun collaborating. The goal can be serious; the collaboration can be fun. People repeatedly speak of the pleasure they derive from collaborating, how it brings out the best in others, and how on occasion the experience takes on the qualities of a classic flow state—lost in the moment, with a strong sense of meaningfulness, joy, challenge, and effortlessness.

Sixth, the “how to’s” for developing the critical success elements of leadership. There is one thing that perhaps makes this book unique: In contrast to the majority of books about collaboration, we focus on the individual collaborative leader. Most titles in this field are about organizations collaborating with organizations and how to create inter-organizational collaboration.

Seventh, a personal taking stock. It’s tough to promote collaboration with and between others if you’re at war within yourself. Getting your own behavior aligned with your own values is part of the secret of being an effective collaborative leader. The foundation of collaborative leadership is self-collaboration. It begins with you because high quality collaboration is an inside-out process. What, you may ask, is self-collaboration? It’s the ability to collaborate with the different aspects of yourself. We will return to this element continuously throughout the book.

So, are you a collaborative leader? Would you like to be? Do you know how to pull people together, inspire them with a meaningful vision, and organize them so that a team spirit emerges and can deliver peak performance? If you would like to say “yes” to these questions, then this book is definitely for you.

Ian McDermott
L. Michael Hall

Part I

The Foundations of
Collaborative Leadership—
Leading the Call

Chapter 1

The Vision

Why Bother?

Collaboration will be the point of differentiation between the companies that grow successfully into the next decade and those that don't.

Neil McPhail, CEO of Best Buy

Successful collaboration is the science of the possible.

Warren Bennis and Patricia Ward Biederman,
*Organizing Genius: The Secrets Of
Creative Collaboration (1998)*

As a leader, why bother with collaboration? What is in it for you and for those you lead? Consider any of the truly great achievements that human beings have created—the pyramids of Egypt, the Great Wall of China, nations uniting to stop Hitler, putting a man on the moon, building sky-scrapers in modern cities. When you do so, you are contemplating acts of collaboration. People came together, worked together, shared a vision, and achieved what would have been impossible alone or apart. Because of a collaborative effort the incredible happened. This is the magic of collaboration.

Or think of the great corporations that exist today—those in the auto industry (Toyota, Volkswagen, General Motors, etc.), the IT industry (Microsoft, Apple, Google, etc.), banking (JPMorgan Chase, HSBC Holdings, Citigroup, etc.), and so on. When you do, you are contemplating acts of collaboration—human beings operating as collaborative partners.

So collaboration is good for the bottom line of profit *and* it is also good for the other two bottom lines of highly successful companies—people and passion. In other words, via collaboration you can create synergy out of the dichotomy between what many people think of as opposites—the hard side and the soft side of business. Collaboration can actually solve many of the problems which businesses suffer today, such as a one-sided overemphasis on money as

the sole criteria of corporate success. Money is important but it is not the sole purpose of commerce. Business also requires a focus on people; it requires responsible, ethical, cooperative individuals. This saves companies from suffering from a silo mentality, indulging in unethical business practices, sacrificing people for the return on investment (ROI), and so on.

At its best, a collaborative vision unleashes hidden and untapped potentials which, in turn, can create a better world for all. Collaboration facilitates a broader vision for work, organizations, and corporations which transcends just profit. Collaboration also enables good people to be great together. The very experience of collaboration changes us. It changes how we relate in our work environments and it changes the business and political cultures we have inherited. Through collaboration we can also tap into emergent expressions of creativity that put us, and our organizations, on the cutting edge of innovation, leading us to pioneering new products, services, and information.

The collaborative vision is about *who we are together* and *the quality of the way we relate*. Collaboration therefore expands what we do and the results that we create together. Potentially, it also expands the quality of our relationships. Here, then, are two great benefits from collaboration. First, we are able to achieve results together that we cannot achieve alone. Second, the quality of our group experience—the culture that results—gives us both a competitive advantage as well as a community of which we can enjoy being a part.

Fostering collaboration also addresses one of the most destructive problems troubling all businesses and organizations—disengagement. Employees who are not engaged in the business—who are bored, resistant, and disloyal—are people who cost the company. They are also dangerous people—a danger to the group spirit, to creativity, and to sustainability. A collaborative culture changes this. Work becomes more engaging because of the quality of our relationships in the workplace and the quality of the teamwork.

When you get people truly caring, connecting, and working together, all kinds of creative ideas and projects emerge. Sometimes this means that individuals begin to have a sense of how they can access their higher values, such as making a difference in the world or contributing to the larger good. When this happens, more is unleashed—and this can take an organization to a whole new level.

The Power of Collaboration

There is an incredible power in collaboration. Human history has demonstrated repeatedly how we can do so much more together than alone or apart. Single heroic leaders are nothing if they cannot foster collaboration.

The power of collaboration has brought about this age of science, technology, space exploration, the social media, and so on. Consider the incredible immensity of the collaboration at CERN in Geneva, Switzerland.¹ CERN, the official name for the European Organization for Nuclear Research, is a large-scale international collaboration of people from seventy countries working together. Palestinians and Israelis working side by side. Iranian and Iraqi scientists working together. All in all, there are more than 2,000 staff members and up to 13,000 people can be on site at any one time.

If collaboration enables science, technology, the arts, and civilization, what then is collaboration? Collaboration is people working together in a partnership to create something that no one individual can create or do single-handedly. This very special state, and state of mind, is about far more than just complying with authority. It is about positively and actively wanting and acting in unity with others to achieve a common goal.

If collaboration refers to working with others, then the opposite is going it alone—the drive for independence, separation, and stepping out alone when no one else believes in our vision. The fascinating thing about human beings is that every one of us feels the pull of both of these forces; they are built into our neurology and psychology. We want to be independent *and* we want to be a part of a community. We want to be true to our innermost self *and* we want to be part of a winning team.

We all begin life within a collaboration, inasmuch as we begin in a family, a community, a town, a nation. Without others, we wouldn't survive at all. All of our basic human needs are met by others. After that begins the developmental pull within us to separate, to individuate, to become a self in our own right, to define ourselves, to find our own way. This instigates the individuation process of childhood and the teenage years as we gradually become independent adults. But, at the same time, we feel yet another urge

1 CERN is home to the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), set in a 27 kilometer circumference circular tunnel located 100 meters underground, which cost multiple billions to construct.

emerging—the social urge, the pull to be a part of a group, to have close friends, to find a special one to love, to become interdependent.

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

**John Donne, Meditation XVII,
Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions (1623)**

The pull of collaboration arises because we are social beings with social needs—for love and affection, for bonding, for companionship, to have colleagues, to be a part of a winning team, to be recognized by peers, to count in their eyes. Yet so many things can mess up this drive. Lots of people are blocked from creative collaborations because of their desire to have things “their way” or because of their need for constant recognition and attention.

Others are blocked from effective collaborations because they haven’t learned basic social skills: listening, supporting, validating, confirming, and taking time to be present. They didn’t learn the lessons of kindergarten—how to play well with others. They are bossy, demanding, self-centered, critical, sarcastic, and unkind. They are not good team players. There are many other blocks that interfere with effective collaboration: fear of change, vested interest in the status quo, fear of loss of self in a group, inability to be a part of a community, lack of vision, and intolerance. We will cover these in the coming chapters.

Nonetheless, in today’s interconnected world, collaboration is more important than ever. Neither individuals nor nations can afford to go it alone, operate in isolation, or act independently from the rest of the world. Realizing “big hairy audacious goals” requires people working together effectively as high performance teams.

Nowadays, companies are moving toward self-managing teams who collaboratively provide leadership and management for an area of responsibility. In order to move to this level of high performance, we need to have self-actualizing individuals—people who want (and know how) to operate as part of a high performance team. They need to know how to tap into each other’s unique differences and enable others to be an important part of the group. To facilitate this, we need collaborative leadership—leaders who have the ability to set a vision, pioneer with a collaborative style, pull people together,

and work through the conflict of differences so that a group spirit emerges.

Some of the most successful companies are the result of collaborative partnerships—individuals working together for mutual benefit. It is our belief that those who do not develop this personal power will be left behind.

What Is Collaboration?

For a clear definition of collaboration we begin with the word itself: *co-* (with) and *labor* (work). An operational definition for collaboration is:

- Working intelligently with other people for a mutual vision and benefit.
- A form of co-leadership, with people working together as partners, which brings out the best in everyone and achieves results that a single person could not have accomplished alone.
- Learning from each other, sharing knowledge freely, helping each other to complete jobs and meet deadlines, and sharing resources for a common good.
- Tapping into differences to create the required synergy that solves problems.
- Working together as a team rather than as disconnected individuals.
- The ability to pull together to actualize a shared vision or solve a problem, and innovate a new solution.

In collaboration, two or more persons come together to combine their understanding, skills, and resources to achieve a richer and fuller outcome than any one person could achieve single-handedly. This means that collaboration is a creative way of interacting and connecting with others which encourages fun, ingenuity, and resourcefulness. Where there is true collaboration, there is a creative synergy of differences. That synergy both unifies and enables individuals to experience an intense and high level of resourcefulness in ideas and actions and, as a result, surprising and unprecedented results often occur.

What is collaboration? How does it relate to leadership? How do you do it effectively? Do you know how to pull people together, inspire them with a meaningful vision, and organize them so that a team spirit emerges and peak performance is achieved? Find the answers to these questions here.

The Collaborative Leader is a practical guide to collaborating with others and leading collaboratively. That means learning how to win the hearts and minds of those who we lead. Packed with practical and immediate action points, this book will show you how to turn around a non-collaborative group or environment immediately. Learn the core competencies that facilitate a healthy, joyful, and productive collaboration.

The foundation of collaborative leadership is self-collaboration. The leader who cannot effectively collaborate cannot effectively lead. If you are to walk your talk, you need to demonstrate collaborative skills yourself. This book will show you the “how to’s” for developing the critical success elements of leadership. The best collaborators are those who have lots of fun collaborating; the goal can be serious but the collaboration can be fun. Learn how it’s possible by understanding the structure and processes of collaboration.

Collaboration is co-laboring, literally “laboring with” others. Given this, it is only natural that a book on collaboration should be written collaboratively by more than one author.

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R. Frank Pucelik, Pucelik Consulting Group, INLPTA, and ANLP

Ian McDermott has worked with hundreds of organizations and thousands of professionals globally. Much of his time is spent advising senior leaders and coaching the next generation to be innovative leaders. From practical experience he knows what it takes to found and run a successful business: International Teaching Seminars is 30 years old.

L. Michael Hall PhD is a cognitive psychologist who, through research into NLP and self-actualization psychology, is a modeler of human excellence. He has authored forty NLP books and a series on Meta-Coaching. Michael co-founded the ISNS (International Society of Neuro-Semantics) and the MCF (Meta-Coaching Foundation) and is an internationally renowned trainer.

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