



# The Collaborative Organization



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*better results through collaboration*





# The Collaborative Organization

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**Hierarchy** is a 5500-year-old system originally used to manage large, unskilled labor pools such as building projects and infantry. It was not designed to run complex organizations such as the ones we have today, where the labor pool is often as well-informed and educated as their “superiors,” sometimes more so. It is ill suited to solving intractable problems such as health care and the energy crisis. And yet, this win/lose system remains one of the most deeply embedded paradigms of our time despite Nobel Prize-winning demonstration that win-win produces the highest possible payoffs for all players.

In the movie “A Beautiful Mind,” the character John Nash serendipitously develops his Nobel Prize-winning Nash Equilibrium while trying to pick up a woman in a bar. In a setting we all understand, the scene depicts what is considered to be one of the major scientific achievements of the first half of the 20th century: A resolution to the conflict between self-interest and the interests of others – true, win-win collaboration. Nash, played by Russell Crowe, is in the bar with several of his college buddies. They’re eyeing a beautiful blonde who is accompanied by several less attractive friends. As they debate how best to proceed, Nash reasons that if each of them goes after the blonde,

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**Adam Smith was wrong. Each person ... benefits most when he does what’s in his own interest and the interests of the group.**

most or all of them will be rejected. Further, they will now be in a poor position to approach any of her friends. If instead they each ask out one of the friends, they’ll all be more likely to wind up with someone, with perhaps only the blonde going home alone. This leads Nash to a revelation:

*Adam Smith was wrong. Each person doesn’t benefit most when he does what’s in his own best interests. He benefits most when he does what’s in his own interest and the interests of the group.*

The blonde forgotten, Nash rushes home to write up his new theorem.

Perhaps, like many, you’re still trying to employ matrix management and team-based organization techniques to address today’s business problems. Your technology and information systems forge ahead, but the leadership practices used to manage them lag behind – way behind. Nearly every organization we encounter is laboring with insufficient tools and systems that will never produce the hoped-for results. The reason they won’t get the results is because they operate according to some version of the win/lose, hierarchical system – which means they still use power and authority as the framework in which to try and accomplish things. Continued use of these practices creates instability and produces predictable, negative results.

For perspective:

- 71% of U.S. workers over the age of 18 are not engaged in their work (Gallup)
- 30% of IT-enabled projects never come to a successful conclusion (Gartner Group)
- 70% of Business Process Redesign (BPR) projects fail (Malhotra)

The mind resists any problem for which there is no apparent solution. Therefore, while most leaders intuitively sense the inherent limitations of hierarchy, lacking a clear alternative, they stick with the system they know. Dr. David Hofmann, UNC Professor of Organizational Behavior says, “Everyone agrees that hierarchy is dead, it’s just that we don’t have anything to replace it with.” Well, now we do. The Collaborative Operating System goes to the heart of Nash’s theorem, enabling workers to engage in ways that serve themselves, each other, and the organization simultaneously. For this reason and many others, the Collaborative Operating System™ offers the ultimate competitive edge in business.

## Collaboration: What is it?

For many organizations, collaboration is expressed as a value or as an orientation toward teamwork. Predictably, it provides little specific and measurable benefit when treated this way. The ubiquitous custom of listing “collaboration” as an espoused value while providing no way to translate that value into a set of real behaviors and processes ensures that it remains only an ambition. Conveying collaboration in this manner, by printing it in an employee handbook or listing it on a wall plaque, for example, will not generate superior results. For that, only a true win/win system will do.

Collaboration, as we define it, is a system in the same way that hierarchy is a system; hence, the name “Collaborative Operating System™”. Windows, Mac

Most people believe that it is the differences among people that keep them from working well together. It isn’t.



OS, and Linux are familiar operating systems that enable us to operate our computers. Likewise, hierarchy is a system of management that leverages power and authority in an effort to generate favorable business results.

Because the hierarchical system is the prevailing paradigm (a paradigm is a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them), we’ve found that explaining the Collaborative Operating System is best begun by distinguishing it from the system of hierarchy. Of course, few people we talk to have ever considered hierarchy as something replaceable. In part that’s the nature of a paradigm. Because it’s all we know, we can imagine no other reality. However, when hierarchy is viewed simply as one framework through which to see reality, one can then imagine that a replacement is possible. In order to consider adopting a replacement system, however, it would need to accomplish everything that hierarchy accomplishes and perhaps more. Fortunately, this isn’t difficult.

One reason people don’t think of “hierarchy” as a system is because its workings are primarily implicit. In fact, this is a key distinction between hierarchy and The Collaborative Operating System™ (COS). Implicit means “implied rather than expressly stated.” The rules of hierarchy are rarely apparent except for that one basic rule we all seem to grasp: Manage up; don’t put off the people above you. Beyond that, the rules tend to vary a great deal from one hierarchical leader to the next.

The Collaborative Operating System™ (COS) is, by contrast, a completely explicit system. Explicit means

“fully and clearly expressed or demonstrated; leaving nothing merely implied.” Because COS is an explicit system, it’s also a transparent system. Everyone can see exactly what everyone else is doing; there’s nowhere to hide in a truly collaborative organization. As such, the COS serves as a substantial barrier to illegal, duplicitous and other win/lose behaviors. Motives and behaviors improve when they become transparent. Just as the hierarchical culture spits out people who are unwilling or unable to abide by the hierarchical values of power and authority, a collaborative culture spits out people operating in ways that are not explicitly collaborative.

Another key distinction between hierarchy and The Collaborative Operating System is the values on which the systems are based. The values are the engine that drive the system. Power and authority are the values of the hierarchical system. They are the “currency” traded in that system. In a hierarchy, people “win” by accumulating more power and authority than others; the more power and authority you accumulate, the more you can accomplish.

This explains why so many CEOs complain, “As soon as I leave the room, my team gets back in their silos!” Of course they do. In a hierarchy, the only person with enough power and authority to force the executive management team to work across silos is the CEO. So much for “teambuilding” retreats. Even lucrative financial incentives are often ineffectual at getting people to work together. The underlying values of power and authority prevail.

Below are two real-life examples of the hierarchical values in motion:

1. An executive at the top of one of the world’s most powerful companies discovered that she was slowly being stripped of her connections and ties to the organization’s most senior and powerful people. Simultaneously, however, they were increasing her financial compensation. We encouraged her not to be confused. She was effectively being demoted. In a hierarchy, the real gold is power and authority.

2. In another company, a CEO began reaching around his Senior Vice President of Human Resources to her most senior staff member, who was in charge of organizational development. The SVP quickly saw to it that her longtime OD employee (our client) was transitioned out of the organization. His growing communication with and proximity to the CEO made him too powerful for her taste.

Seen through the lens of hierarchy, these examples are par for the course. Seen through the COS lens, the motivations behind these hierarchical decisions were left implicit. As a result, those affected by the decisions were left confused, and quite likely, the decisions themselves were of questionable value to their respective organizations. The Collaborative Operating System, by its very nature, does not support these sorts of questionable behaviors.

The treachery and backstabbing practices familiar in the hierarchy can’t survive in this transparent system. The dark corners used for hiding simply vanish. That’s because the COS is based upon the principles of ownership and alignment. Decidedly un-sexy, these pedestrian-sounding principles are nevertheless an extremely powerful engine for the explicit, systemic approach to leading and managing organizations and solving even the most vexing and perplexing problems.

Ownership is defined as “the degree to which people believe or feel that a process, decision, or outcome is theirs.” Alignment is defined as “the degree to which people see and understand the problem, goal, or process in the same way.” Ownership is like getting everyone in the same boat. Alignment is like getting everyone rowing in the same direction. In a collaborative organization, the precious currency is ownership and alignment; not power and authority.

People behave differently because accumulating personal power is not an advantage in the system. Because proficiency in the creation and maintenance of ownership and alignment enables productivity,

# What's The Problem?

A biotechnology firm is trying for the second year in a row to organize a large IT project. They know that success will require teamwork. They also know the disturbingly low success rate for these types of projects. They are organizing the project out of the same leading and managing framework they have used before and hoping, remarkably, for a different result. This approach failed miserably last year, according to more than 600 internal IT professionals brought together for a kick-off meeting. *They were never able to "get moving" on the project because they didn't have alignment around the problem they were trying to solve with the new technology.* This year they are taking the same approach, only this time with help from a different outside firm. This new firm was contacted only a month prior to the event they were hired to plan!

workers become adept (even masterful!) at building ownership and alignment in every aspect of their work. This shift in emphasis from power and authority to ownership and alignment creates a sweeping change in how work is done and how the workers experience it. To those who practice it, it is truly magical.

## How Does Collaboration Work?

The Collaborative Operating System is implemented and learned using a "real-work-in-real-time" approach. This means that an individual or team learns to collaborate while they are achieving work goals, instead of during an "off-site" or while doing training activities that only simulate their real jobs. This enables them to experience realistically the merits of this system while simultaneously building their own capacity to practice it. A real-work-in-real-time approach means that sustainability starts on day one of its implementation. Our clients tell us this approach is very effective and that it more rapidly transfers the tools and skills they need to practice collaboration on their own.

Collaboration is based on developing and evolving the principles of ownership and alignment throughout the organization. These two meta-principles lead to other critical workplace effects such as trust, respect, accountability, and responsibility. In order to operationalize these principles in the workplace, we use the Five Elements of Collaboration. The Five Elements become the new framework for leading, managing, and working.

These are, sequentially:

Element 1 Identify the Problem

Element 2 Involve all Relevant Stakeholders

Element 3 Design and Facilitate  
Collaborative Meetings

Element 4 Form the Collaborative Team

Element 5 Create a Collaborative Plan

## Collaboration in Practice

A while back, we had the opportunity to describe our practice of collaboration to a fast-track executive in a large international company who was suffering the aftermath of a project during which her team had become fragmented. Some of the work relationships had become contentious, just as another big project was starting. Mired in the paradigm, she said, "I think collaboration is too soft; it won't fly here." I asked her to share with me the solution she hoped would address her problem. She began to describe what sounded like a standard team-building approach, to which I responded, "Our approach is nowhere near as soft as the one you are describing." "Okay," she said. "Help me understand your collaborative approach."

I proposed that rather than doing "team-building," she allow us to help her team actually perform its work using this system. Afterwards, she and her team described it as the most effective "teambuilding activity" they'd ever experienced. The fact is, performing high-quality work together is the

## Example

*A project coordinator within a government agency explains that they have just spent nearly \$100 million on a new enterprise resource system (ERP) which she believes has about a 90% chance of failing in implementation. The reason? The people who must use the system in order for it to be a success are saying it does not do what they need it to do, while requiring them to do many things they don't want to do. They were never consulted. Instead, a high-powered consulting house was called in and dictated the specifications of the new system.*

most team-building activity a group can do. And it is more sustainable, too. Collaborative teams don't require off-site retreats or ropes courses to rebuild the precious work relationships that are critical to satisfying, quality results; the relationships feed themselves.

Like many teams, hers had started the project together but not finished together. A group of equally ranked departmental employees, they were trying their best to work together in a system where no one except our client, the Senior Vice President of Human Resources, had enough power and authority to impose a decision. She was often absent from their meetings explaining that she wanted them to feel empowered to do it without her; all the while unknowingly forcing them to attempt their work in a way that would bring them to their knees. Predictably, the group fragmented and their plan fell apart.

**“In a crisis if I had only an hour I'd spend the first 50 minutes defining the problem and the last 10 minutes solving it.”**

~Albert Einstein

Here are some of the presenting issues that contributed to this outcome:

- When the lead member of the project team took an extended leave, no one knew who was in charge.
- One member tried to assert leadership but was rebuked.
- When the one who took extended leave returned, the project was fully underway, yet not being done as she had envisioned.
- There was no alignment on the manner in which the team's internal clients would be serviced.
- There was no alignment on how the team would utilize external resources.
- As relationships deteriorated, the team members worked harder to compensate, and became increasingly angry and accusatory with one another.

The end result: one team member quit, one was fired, and two stopped speaking to each other.

This executive had been imagining that taking people out of their work environment to debrief their project, learn some new techniques, and study one another's personality attributes would change their behavior. This is not what changes behavior. The new behaviors we so desperately want in the work place require that we relinquish the hierarchical paradigm. A few hours spent without their implicit, power- and authority-based approach, using instead an explicit, ownership- and alignment-based approach, enabled this team to experience the value of true collaboration. By each using the same approach to their work, they created order out of the chaos. Shifting from hierarchy to COS is an experience akin to driving in the U.S. after driving in a third world country lacking explicit “rules for the road”. It is a profound difference.

Thus “team-building”, a common practice in hierarchical organizations, becomes an unnecessary artifact in a collaborative organization. In fact, most turnaround practices of hierarchical organizations become artifacts. This is because these practices are actually “patches” on an inadequate system. Strategic planning, performance management systems, and 360-degree feedback tools can go away.

One young business owner who was trained in Myers-Briggs astutely noted, “We no longer need Myers-Briggs to tell us who has what type of intelligence. The Collaborative Operating System makes every type of intelligence accessible to every person at the time when they most need it. This system doesn’t require ENTJs as leaders in order to function. It enables regular folks with average intelligence to be successful with projects of great scale and complexity. Welcome to the new world of work, where work is fruitful and fulfilling.

The “best practice” approaches used in the hierarchical organization are Band-Aids and workarounds to change a win/lose system into a friendlier, flatter, less abrasive win/lose system. Yet, because the fundamental nature of hierarchy actually impedes collaboration and win/win behavior, these approaches miss the mark. No wonder workers are so frustrated and organizational development professionals in such demand.

Going forward, we provide several examples from well-known companies that are considered well-led and quite profitable. In each case, we will look at how the Five Elements of Collaboration can be used to impact these troubling, but common, scenarios.

## Element 1: Identify the Problem

Every piece of collaborative work begins with one simple, yet powerful, question: “What problem are we trying to solve?” In this context, a “problem” is

defined as “any situation you want to change.” The results from answering this question stand in stark contrast to those from answering the usual question, “What are we trying to do?” The latter will likely yield a set of activities, but not goals which will forward the business’s agenda.

By starting with the question, “What problem are we trying to solve?” you do several important things. First, you determine whether the project is even legitimate; that, in fact, a business problem exists. Solving real business problems is the primary work of organizations. Yet every day in business, an expensive, time-consuming endeavor is born that will never actually address the real issues facing the organization. Secondly, you ensure that the stakeholders believe the problem is worth solving and can be solved. People won’t truly commit themselves to a project they don’t believe is worth solving and can be solved. More likely, they’ll ignore it or undermine it.

*An executive on the management team of a respected international company describes his role this way: “My job is to run around and smooth ruffled feathers among the various [division] leaders so that the work can actually move ahead without people getting so bent out of shape that they can’t function.” He notes further that, “when one of these leaders makes a decision to embark on a project, it almost always has negative implications for some other leader. Then, everything just stops until we get it all worked out. This work requires at least 60% of my time.”*

Example



*A Fortune 500 company organizes a yearly leadership development initiative in which they require senior managers and executives to devote three weeks to classroom, lecture, and small group discussions. When asked, those in charge of organizing the program do not have an objective for it. When pressed, they say the program is to support the strategic objectives of the company, yet no such affiliation between strategic objectives and program objectives exists. In fact, not one single measurable objective exists for the program. Still, this company will spend many millions of dollars with a major university, high-profile speakers, travel expenses, and, of course, time away from other commitments.*

Thirdly, you forge a level of ownership and alignment that results in a high level of commitment that will be evident in every phase that follows. If you don't create ownership and alignment around the problem, you'll never have ownership and alignment around a solution. Many leaders and teams waste their precious time discussing and disputing solutions when they could shortcut the process by aligning around the problem. Ownership and alignment around the problem makes ownership and alignment around the solution a shockingly easy task. What makes it challenging is that this alignment work, like much of the work involved in true collaboration, is not something most people have ever been trained to do.

## Element 2: Involve all Relevant Stakeholders

The second step in successful collaboration is to have the right people involved from the very beginning. Nothing will destroy trust faster than leaving a key stakeholder out of the process. Most executives do not have a systematic framework for thinking about what constitutes a "relevant stakeholder." When you fail to build ownership and alignment with key stakeholders, it costs you dearly down the road. Today's excluded stakeholder is tomorrow's antagonist or saboteur.

In Example 1, collaboration would require building ownership and alignment between the people who will use the ERP system (i.e., much of the workforce) and the people who will design, install, and maintain the system. This is, simplistically speaking, the great challenge of ERP projects and, of course, it is easier said than done. Indeed, it will require a great many future system users to be gathered together to glean input and instruction about how they need the system to function in order for it to be useful to them in their work. And this is only the beginning; it is just one of many collaborative steps that will need to happen in order for the project to be successful.

However, collaboration is the *shortcut*. ERP and other projects that require stakeholder involvement will otherwise fail, and at great cost. If you are shaking your head now and saying that this takes too much time, then consider again the price tag on this system and the costs of failure. Consider also the benefits of success. Collaborative work succeeds. The commitment level of the participants ensures it.

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## Element 3: Design and Facilitate Collaborative Meetings

Many people complain that they spend too much time in painful, unproductive meetings. These meetings lack focus, churn repeatedly around the same issues, and fail to generate productive action. This causes work relationships to break down, so that people actually emerge from a meeting feeling less engaged than when they started. Yet with few exceptions, the typical response of a participant to their first truly collaborative meeting is, “This is the best meeting I’ve ever attended.”

Adhering to the principles of ownership and alignment while employing a strategic and systematic approach enables COS meeting participants to produce reliable results, high levels of accountability, and an increase in the level of trust. Our meetings engage participants in a way that leverages their experience, knowledge, wisdom and creative capacity. This approach works for every meeting – whether with two participants or 2000, formal or informal, live or via teleconference. Paradoxically, the increase in structure yields more flexibility.

In Example 4, the meetings of the management team are painful and unproductive. You can therefore bet that the meetings in most of the rest of the organization are as well. Because there is no explicit process for how they conduct meetings, they are “nice” to one another, but have no constructive way to engage in disagreement and conflict; they make half-hearted commitments for which there is no ownership; they point fingers, but avoid commitments that would enable them to be held accountable; they initiate their own projects without consideration for the impact on their fellow team members.

While these four examples are intended to illustrate separately the Five Elements of Collaboration, some

problems are so complex and entrenched that ultimate success depends on all five elements being in place and working together as a system. Examples of these types of “wicked” problems are conflict in the Middle East, climate change negotiations, and poverty.

## Element 4: Form the Collaborative Team

*Form the Team* is a critical step for a work group, team, or any successful working relationship. It ensures ownership and alignment around the goals, as well as around the way people will work together to accomplish these goals. A properly formed collaborative team does not unravel, fragment, and become ineffective in response to issues of roles and responsibilities, scope of work, execution, different work styles, and competing values and interests. This step pays big dividends, as a team is able to move

*A CEO laments that the management team does not fully participate in meetings: “They are nice but not honest with one another. They don’t object during the meeting, but later, there are a lot of gaping holes where no one seems to be responsible. This makes it hard to hold anyone accountable for results. Instead, I get finger pointing and independent, cowboy initiatives where team members just take off and do their own thing without regard for the rest of the team.”*

Example **4** .....

swiftly and collaboratively in the “real work” which follows. Additionally, members of the team quickly realize the need to integrate some version of this systematic and collaborative formation process in all their work, further seeding this powerful collaborative practice in the organization.

In Example 2, the management team has no agreement for how they will work together in decision making, problem solving, conflict resolution, meeting attendance, and such. The “team” often does not know when they are discussing a matter on which they will need to take action. Also, even when they are aware that a decision needs to be made, they may not agree on who has the authority to make the decision and how that will happen. This causes people to resort to tactics of politics, power, and personality in order to serve their individual agendas – a practice that is frighteningly common. The impact of not having an explicit agreement for how decisions will be made and problems will be solved is enormous. Decision making and problem solving are the primary work of a management team!

Our process for forming a team yields a unique kind of trust. Although the team members may not yet trust one another on a sustained basis, they discover that they can trust the collaborative process. Trust in the process is a requirement for high performance. Few people understand this.

Now, perhaps you are inclined to argue. “Say what you want about this company, they are profitable, so what’s the problem?” Two answers to this valid question are “Yes, but how much more profitable could they be?” and “At what cost are they profitable?” One cost is the unsatisfying work relationships the team must endure, day in, day

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out, year after year, not to mention the frustration and disengagement from their work created by relationships under constant strain. According to Gallup’s studies, low engagement correlates with low customer loyalty, low sales, and low profitability. We have become so accustomed to these costs that we assume they are necessary.

## Element 5: Create a Collaborative Plan

Element 4 in a collaborative system is about planning the work; yet in a departure from the planning process many work groups use, our process builds ownership and alignment among key stakeholders. This ensures that stakeholders are committed to the project so it won’t unravel in implementation.

A plan is collaborative if the stakeholders own it and they are aligned around it. Simplistically speaking, a collaborative plan is created by developing ownership and alignment around three things: 1) the current state (which includes the “problem”), 2) the desired future state, i.e., the goals, and 3) the path to get from one to the other. As with the previous three elements, the ability to successfully perform Element 4 requires the ability to design and facilitate collaborative meetings (Element 3).

As you have no doubt noted in Example 3, also neglected are Collaborative Elements 2 and 4 – Involve All Relevant Stakeholders and Form the Collaborative Team. One challenge the organizers face will be involving others to participate in their

program. Because the group working on this initiative is not aligned around a plan, their work will conflict. For example, different interpretations about the goals of the program will lead to different ideas about who should be involved.

In addition, because they have not aligned with the stakeholders who created the business strategy or the stakeholders who will participate in the program, the program will amount to a non-sequitur, neither bolstering the strategy of the business nor adequately meeting the business needs of those who have to implement it.

Finally, because they do not have a thorough plan that includes adequate attention to essential elements, such as roles and responsibilities, objectives, scope, and resources, it will be rough sailing, even after they have run it for a few years. The “left hand won’t know what the right hand is doing” and the team will fragment.

In our experience, most people have never even witnessed the creation of true ownership and alignment, much less built it into an entire collaborative project plan. Except for a few rare exceptions, this ability to create true ownership and alignment does not exist in our culture.

## Is Your Leadership Team Ready for the 21st Century?

Despite all the team-based tools and structural techniques that are being taught and implemented today, the hierarchically based approach most organizations use naturally disengages people. These seemingly collaborative tools are not solutions to the real problem and therefore will never be able to supersede the purely hierarchical system on which they are overlaid.

The way most executives are taught and incented to lead, manage, and work, separates the people with the information from those who make the decisions,

and the people who make the decisions from those who will implement them.

Moreover, the degree of complexity in today’s fast-moving marketplace is simply beyond the capacity of most management systems. Let’s face it – there is plenty of technology at our disposal. We can buy great strategy from the best consulting houses. Making that new technology or strategy work, however, is the real challenge. Re-energizing your focus on implementation and “flawless” execution won’t cut it. The level of complexity that accompanies the most significant problems (often euphemistically referred to as “opportunities”) that organizations face is too great.

The system of hierarchy was never designed to handle the level of complexity that a \$10 billion global organization faces in the information age.

## The Problem With Something “New”

In the February 2006 issue of Harvard Business Review, thought leader Gary Hamel wrote about the imperative of management innovation. Hamel said, “if you want to build an organization that unshackles the human spirit, you’re going to need some decidedly unbureaucratic management principles.” Further, he says, “It usually takes a crisis to motivate deep change. But that isn’t some law of nature; it’s merely an artifact of a top-heavy distribution of power.” He concludes by saying that companies can wait for a competitor to stumble upon the next great management breakthrough or choose to innovate now.

Unfortunately, just the task of comprehending an alternative system for leading, managing, and working can be too challenging. Most everyone we encounter can only imagine collaborative tools and techniques overlaid onto a hierarchical system. And when the business is turning a reasonable profit, most leaders lack the will to take their organization to the next level. In a recent exchange, a university MBA Dean

and Professor of Organizational Behavior steeped in the current paradigm asserted, “All organizations need some degree of hierarchy in order to reduce the number of communication linkages and to manage coordination.” I replied, “I don’t agree. The hierarchical system stifles communication and undermines coordination. With all due respect, hierarchy is a paradigm and you are encumbered by the paradigm.” His paradigmatic view keeps him from perceiving hierarchy as a system that could conceivably be replaced by another, alternative system capable of accomplishing the same, or in this case, far better results.

Still, we recognize that most organizational leaders aren’t searching for an alternative to the hierarchical system. They are, however, looking for solutions: Solutions to the silo effect, the project team that can’t solve the problem, the off-site team-building retreat that has no long-term effects, the capable employees who are underperforming or not engaged, the 20% success rate of mergers and acquisitions, and on and on. And for these and every other problem that you

cannot solve in the current paradigm, there’s a simple step you can take: Use COS in one small venue – a project work team, a single meeting, or even a simple one-on-one problem-solving conversation. Using it in a real-work-in-real-time setting, you’ll gain perspective on the enormous strategic advantage this system provides.

In stark contrast to the prevailing (psychologically destructive) hierarchical system that connects the organization through units of “I tell you what to do,” the Collaborative Operating System connects and engages people through units of truly self-governing teams. This comprehensive, revolutionary, win-win approach to leading and managing organizations in the 21st century is by far and away the most strategic approach to work.





## The Collaboration Imperative

Many have tried to democratize their workplace by becoming “flatter” and working in teams. Yet power and authority remain the currency. Accumulate enough power and authority in a hierarchical system, and you’ll get something accomplished and “win.”

But hierarchy concentrates power and authority in a few people at the very top. This prevents the rest of the organization from having the necessary currency to solve problems and achieve goals. It makes working across the silos nearly impossible. And it makes the “leader” with the most power and authority essential. (If being essential sounds good to you, get used to none of your subordinates making decisions, being accountable, or acting on your vision.)

Teams that are able to capitalize on and coordinate the talents, training, experience, and wisdom of their members are the exception. More common are the teams that manage to function at a uniformly lower level than any one individual member. People need a way to work cohesively as they manage the complexity of multiple stakeholders with different ideas and conflicting interests.

The interdependent, multi-faceted problems and opportunities facing leaders of organizations require a new approach. It is time to eliminate point solutions and the steady stream of fad management tools and techniques which just add to the confusion, chaos, and already manic pace of business. Workers need a single, coherent system for leading, managing, and working; a common framework that keeps people working together within the tumult so characteristic of business today. They need a system that engages them by connecting

the people with the information to those who make decisions, and the people who make decisions to those who implement them.

The participants who find their way into our COS training program begin this journey from a highly skeptical place. Yet they emerge believing, as we do, that in the next 20-50 years, this win/win, collaborative system will be how we work, do problem-solving, and manage organizations. A few young, socially-conscious folks have even seen it as the underpinning for a new, much-needed democracy – and are successfully using it to navigate the excruciating morass of government bureaucracy.

The Collaborative Operating System enables the highest possible payoff for all players and offers a desperately needed resolution to the conflict between self-interest and the interests of others. Let’s hear it for win/win!. ❖

## About Collaborative Leaders, Inc.

Our work is developing collaborative leaders.. We coach and train leaders in collaboration so they can achieve extraordinary, sustainable business results and solve even the most complex business problems.

Our vision is to develop a critical mass of leaders who use collaboration as their primary way of leading and solving problems. We believe that increased collaboration will bring dramatic improvement to key global problems, both within and beyond the world of business.

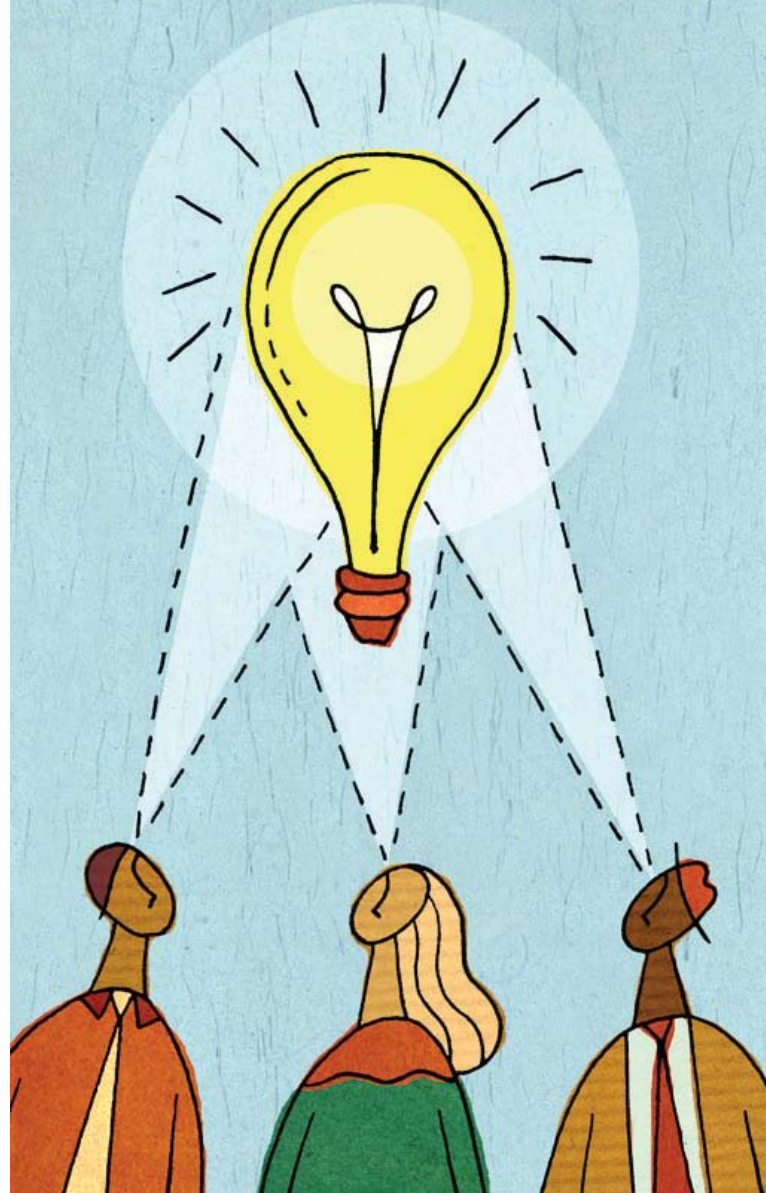
## About The Authors

### Rachel Conerly

As a management consultant whose expertise is executive coaching and collaborative organizational development, Rachel works with executives, teaching and coaching them to be collaborative leaders.

### Tim Kelley

In addition to teaching and coaching executives to be collaborative leaders, Tim also helps executive teams discern their unique higher purpose. He is a public speaker and author.



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