



# Book Mastering the Art of Creative Collaboration

Robert Hargrove  
McGraw-Hill, 1998

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## Recommendation

Robert Hargrove presents a well-organized look at the world of creative collaboration. He argues that collaboration is the new paradigm in a world of change and complexity, as well as an effective management strategy. Hargrove provides a hands-on guide to becoming more collaborative and to organizing effective collaborative groups. In this lively, engaging book, Hargrove shows his familiarity with the latest management expertise. He draws on quotes and ideas from such authors as Margaret Wheatley, Peter Senge and Tom Peters. *BooksInShort.com* recommends this book to executives and managers who wish to facilitate collaborations.

## Take-Aways

- The top-down hierarchical model is being replaced by a new paradigm based on collaborative relationships.
- It is increasingly difficult for anyone to accomplish anything of significance alone.
- People are collaborating across professional and cultural boundaries.
- Collaboration involves a shared creation or discovery that leads to a breakthrough.
- Collaborative people know their own view or talent is limited; they understand that they need collaborators with other views and talents.
- The individualistic model blinds us to the real creativity and effectiveness that comes through collaboration.
- A creative collaboration brings extraordinary combinations of people together to achieve extraordinary results.
- Begin a creative collaboration with a "declaration of impossibility," describing the breakthrough result you want.
- To become a collaborative person, see yourself as a visionary leader, creator, and organizing maestro who can bring a group of extraordinary people together.

## Summary

### The Changing Paradigm

The founding of the United States was based on a concern with human rights and equality. However, over the years, U.S. society has moved away from that premise. Now, it emphasizes pursuing economic goals, not pursuing goals to benefit humanity. But this is shifting. Now, technology and economic growth offer new ways to achieve a new human agenda. Welcome this new era, in which human values surround and shape economic means and technology, rather than the other way around. This shift is as profound as the rise of democracy and the development of the Industrial Age and the Information Age. This shift will be characterized by a coming age of creativity and collaboration. This era's increased interest in reconciliation and compassion will contribute to resolving some of the world's most serious problems.

## **The Nature of Creative Collaboration**

Creative collaboration involves working with others to produce creative results. You don't need very creative or extraordinary people to achieve results. Rather, by bringing knowledgeable people together, you inspire them to achieve extraordinary results. The process works when people come together with the desire or need to discover or develop something new. The key characteristics of a creative collaboration are:

- Bringing together an extraordinary combination of people with different views and perspectives who realize that their own views and abilities aren't enough to turn something into a reality.
- Basing the endeavor on shared goals that all parties understand to enable people to work towards achieving a purpose larger than themselves.
- Creating new shared understandings with new and different results, which emerge as people join together to understand a problem and its causes, and to figure out an action-based solution.
- Engaging in an act of shared creation, as people with different approaches and views create and discover something new.
- Accepting a variety of possible forms of collaborating.

“For people to collaborate, they must see the goal as significant and as something they cannot achieve on their own.”

Creative collaborations go beyond just teamwork, where teams are involved in working together on something routine or just doing the same thing better. Rather, they involve a team or any group in doing something new and creative.

## **The Growth of Creative Collaboration**

A growing number of examples of creative collaboration are available today. As our society becomes more complex, it is increasingly difficult for anyone to accomplish anything significant without working with other people. Thus, more and more people are collaborating across professional lines and across the boundaries of cultural, ethnicity, corporate hierarchy and other categories. Collaborations are growing as the age of hierarchy and specialization comes up against the emergence of a new age based on complexity.

“Whenever anything of significance is being accomplished in the world today, it is being accomplished by people collaborating across professional and cultural frontiers.”

At one time, when problems were simpler, you could be successful in an organization based on top-down leadership and individuals doing specialized tasks. But now a new model - lateral leadership - is emerging. Lateral leaders encourage and promote creative collaborations, uniting specialists and experts from different perspectives. Often the people you want for a collaboration don't work in your organization or even in your city. Now, because of new technologies, people can live hundreds or thousands of miles away and communicate via e-mail, phone, or fax as they work together.

“Creating shared understood goals allows smart people with big egos to subordinate their egos while contributing to something significant and lasting.”

For a long time, the Great Man theory or individualistic model has blinded our society. In this model, people look to charismatic, powerful figures for leadership. They credit individuals with breakthrough discoveries. Most of these individuals built on the work of others or engaged in creative collaborations to develop their ideas. Creative collaboration is becoming more important in all fields, including history, science, the arts, politics, and economics, as well as business. More and more management consultants and business writers are recognizing creative collaborations.

“Collaboration is an idea whose time has come.”

For example, about ten years ago, Michael Porter claimed that strategic success occurred because a company developed a certain core competence. However, now more and more companies are realizing they need to develop a collaborative advantage, in which they work together with other companies to create a better product or service for customers. That’s what Bill Gates did when he combined with Intel after developing Microsoft Windows, while Andy Grove of Intel developed the Pentium chip as a result of his collaboration with Microsoft. Think about how you can team up with other companies, even your competitors, to come up with new products and services together.

## **The Basic Steps to Making a Creative Collaboration Happen**

To make a creative collaboration happen in your company, follow these five basic steps.

1. Make a declaration of impossibility, which describes the breakthrough result you want to happen.
2. Unite an extraordinary combination of people who can help you turn your idea of the impossible into something real.
3. Build a shared understood goal that will turn an intangible possibility into a specific project that you can work to make happen.
4. Do a comprehensive what’s so, which is a factual analysis of what currently exists, so you are clear about what exists now compared to what you want to achieve. Recognize what works and what doesn’t work, and be aware of your strengths and weaknesses, so you have a clear picture of where you are and where you want to go.
5. Identify anything missing that you need to achieve your goal. Ask what you need to do to fill in any missing pieces, so you can achieve this breakthrough.

## **How to Become a Collaborative Person and Leader**

To become more collaborative, you need to think of yourself differently, since different attitudes and thoughts lead to different actions. So start seeing yourself as a visionary leader, a creator. Envision yourself as an organizing maestro who can bring together an extraordinary group of people to create real value. You need a vision of possibility, of the goal you feel passionate about realizing. Recognize the limits on your own views or experiences, and be willing to learn with a beginner’s mind. Hire people who are passionate and creative.

“When a new idea is born and the climate of the times shifts, people are brought to the edge of their old views and practices, and begin to feel uncomfortable.”

When Fidelity Investments took this approach, the company made a number of breakthroughs. For instance, they became the first company to use toll-free numbers to sell stocks over the phone directly to customers rather than requiring the customer to go to a broker’s office. They were the first to offer check cashing for customers investing in mutual funds. These changes helped make Fidelity more successful. Steve Jobs is another good collaborator. He teamed up with many other people to revitalize Apple.

“A new era of collaborative organizations characterized by lateral leadership and virtual teams is emerging.”

The qualities shared by most collaborative people are especially valuable in today’s world. On the other hand, the qualities that mean success in the hierarchical world may make it difficult to collaborate and succeed today. For example, an expert in a field may become a know-it-all. Avoid becoming so committed to your own agenda that you don’t see the larger picture. Be alert: Don’t try to unduly pressure others to embrace your point of view. Instead, follow these rules for success in a collaborative environment:

- Create or find a project that makes a difference, since success is measured by project accomplishments rather than by your position on a hierarchical ladder.
- Learn to be a collaborative team player and colleague, rather than thinking of yourself as a manager.
- Bring in a group of people with diverse skills and perspectives to make up the team you put together.
- Become an extraordinary expert in a particular area that creates value. Promote what you do so you can add value to a team or project with others.

“Collaborative advantage often involves creating new ways to think and work with others that presently may not exist, not just simply combining two technologies like ingredients in an omelet.”

In addition to becoming more of a collaborative person yourself, resolve to be different. Try to use a transformational learning approach to changing yourself from the inside out. This way, you learn to create your identity from your own individuality and your desire for success, and from the community and your connections with others. As a collaborative person, you have to expand who you are, so that you have a community view of the self - your identity includes both the community and you.

## Developing and Launching Collaborative Projects

Besides becoming more collaborative, work on making your whole organization more collaborative, too. The structure of an organization influences the network of relationships and people's behavior. Keep in mind that the collaborative corporations of the future will be made up of lateral leaders from different fields. These leaders will have important core knowledge or technological expertise. To become more collaborative, use these seven key steps:

1. Reinvent yourself as a lateral leader. This means you recognize the big picture and the lateral relationships you need to build among other leaders. With this relationship in place, you can accomplish important objectives.
2. Seek out competent people and strategic partners. Bring in other people with the skills and competencies you need, people who can combine this knowledge with an ability to work with others.
3. Build a shared understood goal, since you need a powerful unifying focus to bring people together and overcome the tendency people have to pursue their own agendas.
4. Designate clear roles and responsibilities, so people know what they are doing. At the same time, don't put up restrictive controls or boundaries. You want people to share readily. You will find that they will self-organize as needed to get the work done.
5. Get everyone solidly behind the project. Participate extensively in dialogue grounded in real problems, so you discuss different possibilities and approaches.
6. Create shared work spaces where people can work together. Include space for doing such tasks as creating scale models or prototypes.
7. Load the project with zest factors. Involve people who feel passionate about what they are doing and have fun doing it.

“Stop thinking of yourself as a 'manager' - an obsolete term. Instead, think of yourself as being an 'effective team person.’”

With these principles in mind, bring together the people you feel are right for a project. Start off effectively with a first meeting. Use this initial launch meeting to discuss what you hope to do. Take time to establish rapport and trust. Establish ground rules so people can freely discuss their opinions and feelings. Encourage a continuing dialogue to gather information from diverse perspectives and to gain new ideas. Open the conversation to consider new options based on different views. Then you can decide on the best option for action, with the support of everyone involved in the collaborative project.

## About the Author

**Robert Hargrove** is one of the world's leading experts on collaboration in the workplace. He is the founder of the Institute for Creative Collaboration. He is an executive coach, group facilitator, and international consultant to organizations in government, business, and education. He is also the author of *Masterful Coaching: Extraordinary Results by Impacting People* and *The Way They Think and Work Together*.

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