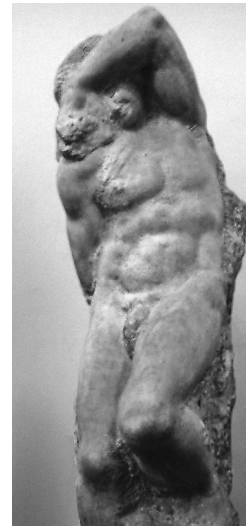


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An Invitation to Collaborative Leadership

CUTTING STONE

Michelangelo sculpted a series of statues named “The Slaves” in which the torsos of four men appear to emerge from separate roughhewn blocks of marble. With the smooth, almost warm, flesh of a shoulder here, the turn of a jaw line there, a hip stretching into a struggling thigh, these sculptures reveal an artist’s vision, releasing four figures with chisel and hammer from their stone prisons. Each of us holds the potential of this uncut stone. Anyone who has committed himself or herself to children, families, and some form of public service has within him or her the capacity to be a collaborative leader. This book invites you to look inside yourself and your work as a person, a professional, and an educator, to find and hone the skills and temperament of collaboration. Trust that they are there. Then, together, let’s reflect on and construct a disciplined framework for doing and teaching collaboration and collaborative leadership.



Michelangelo, Prisoner 1, Galleria dell’Accademia Museum, Florence, Italy. Photo by José-Manuel Benito Álvarez, used by permission under License Creative Commons Attribution 2.5. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/>

WORKING DEFINITIONS

Our tools are words and behaviors; our media are relationships and organizational systems. So let’s begin with words.

All too often, definitions become sticking points rather than helpful tools; lightning rods for picky and contentious debates that are often exciting (for those of us nerdy enough to find such things exciting) but, just as often,

distracting diversions from the real work at hand. The trick is to agree upon definitions that mean the same thing to the variety of people who use them, that reduce confusion, introduce only the bare minimum of distractions, and help us get our work done. The following definitions are the products of challenges, revisions, and knock-down drag-out battles going back more than ten years. Even so, let's treat them as continuing works in progress.

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*“ . . . a purposeful relationship
in which all parties choose
to cooperate . . . ”*

Collaboration: A collaboration is a purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically choose to cooperate in order to achieve shared or overlapping objectives. Because of its voluntary nature, the success of a collaboration

depends on one or more collaborative leader's ability to build and maintain these relationships.¹

Collaborative leader: You are a collaborative leader once you have accepted responsibility for building—or helping to ensure the success of—a heterogeneous team to accomplish a shared purpose.² Your tools are (1) the purposeful exercise of your behavior, communication, and organizational resources in order to affect the perspective, beliefs, and behaviors of another person (generally a collaborative partner) to influence that person's relationship with you and your collaborative enterprise and (2) the structure and climate of an environment that supports the collaborative relationship.

The ability to inaugurate and sustain relationships influencing individuals and institutions; the ability to recruit and retain stakeholders and decision makers with diverse missions and goals who find their self-interests served by collaboration; and the ability to establish and maintain a level of productivity in the collaboration that satisfies the collective and individual interests of its members defines the effective collaborative leader.

Relationship management: Relationship management is what a collaborative leader does. It is the purposeful exercise of behavior, communication, and organizational resources to affect the perspective, beliefs, and behaviors of another person (generally a collaborative partner) to influence that person's relationship with you and your collaborative enterprise. (We will use the phrase “relationship building and relationship management” as roughly synonymous with *collaborative leadership*.)

Collaborative leadership: Collaborative leadership is the skillful and mission-oriented facilitation of relevant relationships. It is the juncture of organizing and management. Whereas teachers, community, and labor organizers are trained to patiently build their movements through one-on-one

conversations with each individual they want to recruit, collaborative leaders do this and more by building *structures* to support and sustain these productive relationships over time.

NOTES

1. A collaboration is a social construct in which the contributions of collaborative leaders are optimized. Practically speaking, many constructs that don't look or sound like collaborations can fall within this definition: voluntary associations, social groups, committees, churches, teams, coalitions, boards, and blue ribbon panels we choose to join can fit this definition. But what about committees, work groups, task forces, classes, and teams to which we're assigned at work or school? The answer is "yes" to all of these; even groups to which you find yourself appointed may fit this definition. Here's why: A collaboration is, first, *purposeful*, with goals (no matter how vague) that serve to justify its convening. It is a *relationship*, meaning that it is not parallel play but, rather, a collective and interactive endeavor. That "all parties *strategically choose* to cooperate" articulates the basic reality that, although anyone can be forced to passively or robotically sit in a meeting, the nature of the relationship changes when one or more participants—by his or her volition and for his or her own purpose (strategy)—chooses to engage. What this definition does not fit is circumstances in which people choose to sit passively—or only participate robotically.

2. Let's be very clear: "collaborative" does not prescribe the context in which leadership happens, rather it modifies "leader" to describe the type, style, and purpose of the leader. In other words: *Collaborative leaders do not necessarily (or only) lead collaborations, they lead collaboratively.*