



The Art and Science of Collaborative Innovation: A General Theory*

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Abstract

This article shares our research, the aim of which is to cure the critical lack of Collaborative Innovation in business, government, politics, military, and personal relationships. The article proposes that Collaborative Innovation comes from 'Continuous Curiosity' with the effect of rotating leadership, and recombination processes in symbiotic (flowing) relationships. (1) Our intent is to certify candidates in a coherent structure for identifying fundamental elements of Collaborative Innovation, turning it into practices based on one simple theory, and producing breakthroughs; ultimately, to have many people practicing on their deepest concerns and the most important problems in the world. Our mission is to encourage "deep dives" into what lies at the bottom of the iceberg of Collaborative Innovation in human affairs, and to reveal what really matters in transforming that base metal into gold.

1. Common Challenges in Achieving Collaborative Innovation have been:

- Willingness to change structure and authority relationships, at least temporarily, to enable Collaborative Innovation.
- Creating shared commitment to a singular collective Strategic Intent.
- Fear of not getting agreement from others.
- The intent to integrate intention and flow.
- Inability to see two/multiple realities at the same time and serially, i.e., the reality of the quality of relationships and the reality of measurement and physical performance.
- Willingness to speak from the heart.
- Ability to pay attention to one's confusion before one's certainty.
- Acceptance that Relationship (how people are being with each other) is the foundation of accomplishment in Collaborative Innovation.
- The ability to Connect and Move On, respecting what you get, and not being stuck with it.
- The ability to Integrate madness and accuracy in real time.
- The character of leaders often shapes what's possible or forbidden in Collaborative Innovation, i.e. courage, competence, forgiveness, persistence, caring, patience,

* This paper is the outcome of conversations with fellow members of The Institute for Collaborative Freedom.

capacity for silence, ability to accept or embrace paradox and contradiction, imagination, discipline, generous listening, contemplation, concrete action, and committed speaking. These are observable in aspiration, committed action, behavior, practice, allowable feedback, and the experience of others.

“Breaking Free turns energy into form.”

2. PREMISE: “Systems with the most available energy will prevail. Good ideas, products, organization and the force of will are not enough.”*

– Victor Sanchez

As Sanchez points out, the pull of the existing culture’s gravity always wins without the Energetic Awareness that enables Escape Velocity and the ability to see, address, and overcome cultural and personality barriers. This requires personally paying attention and addressing it directly when we see that energy is low or missing. It means directing energy where we want it to increase, (i.e., it is always our job to enliven a boring meeting and move things forward). This energy expansion is always a momentary event allowing us to Break Free of the gravity of the current circumstances. In the next moment another set of gravitational forces will need to be contended with—gravity never goes away.

In physics, an energy field is a Force Field, a vector field, that describes a non-contact force acting on a particle at various positions in space. Our research, and practical application in business, government and human relationships over the past 50 years suggest that similarly, there are a number of such ‘fields’ or ‘contexts’ within which human energy expands within individuals and groups.

Strategy and action soundly rooted in these ‘energy fields’ have consistently produced ‘breakthroughs’ in performance, relationships, and culture.

3. The Smith Energy Fields

Human Mutuality is the way people are connected, to themselves, to others, and to the physical and natural world. It is the way we are *being* with each other, and the structure or nature of our connections.

The Overview Effect: Upon breaking free of Earth’s gravity and going to space, some astronauts experienced a surprising change in their perspective of life on Earth. Author Frank White[†] named this phenomenon “The Overview Effect;” a deep, personal, profound experience that radically alters one’s world view and the nature of reality. Astronauts who experienced this were witness to a message about how to be, with the planet and with each other. This message about being “in the same boat” together points to an opportunity for many of us to break free of “the way it is” and create moments of transcendence that go beyond identity, individually and collectively. It is about shifting our point of view to see that what needs attention in our companies, communities, and relationships is always greater than the sum of the parts.

* See <http://eruditio.worldacademy.org/volume-2/issue-1/article/breaking-free-bringing-overview-effect-life-and-work>

Contemplative Action comes from codes, education, practices and leadership that promote special virtues of character: compassion, honesty, forbearance, humility, strength, perseverance, courage, courtesy, extreme care in details, self-reliance.

Breaking Free turns energy into form. It is physical action that produces a demonstrable result. Breaking Free requires energy to loosen the grip of gravity (whether going to space or gaining freedom from past beliefs and culture, past relationships, etc.). A portal/ gateway to ‘choice’ where none existed before, it is entirely an energetic phenomenon that requires the power and intention to achieve Escape Velocity and at least temporarily reach Zero Gravity—where free choice exists.

Islands of Sanity are an experience of coherence, safety, boundaries conversational or spiritual. They can be found/created in a sanctuary, a relationship, a place, a project, a mission...

Harmony through Conflict requires the intent to come to, or return to, alignment/ shared commitment. It calls for a background intent to create an experience of ‘us’—being in something together. This is impossible to define, as opposites must be included. It requires full self-expression and a willingness to fight/engage to get another’s attention, and the capacity/skill to not automatically react to differences. It is not risk-averse, but includes a willingness to forgive and forbear. It is not soft, but built on an insistence for honesty and truth about one’s actual experience. It is a search for metaphor that respects and embraces everyone involved, heals, and avoids right-wrong language.

The Merlin Factor indicates that the principal impediment to changing an organization’s strategic direction is its existing culture, (that is, people’s current beliefs about the limits of what is possible). Changing people’s beliefs about the future can produce extraordinary improvements in quality management, technical innovation, customer service and profitability. This culture-changing process of leadership through a radical strategic vision follows a pattern the author calls, ‘The Merlin Factor’, (based on the legendary magician who ‘lived backward in time’).

Committed Speaking is to honor your word as yourself.

Evidence Consists of different Types of Speaking:

- **Conversations from the Future**

Examples: Declaration—speaking that is not true or false, but valid or invalid. The authority comes simply from the fact that “you said so.”

I declare. . .

I say that. . . This will be. . .

- **Conversations from the Present**

The facts are,

I think that,

My opinion is,

My analysis is,

I agree/don’t agree

Examples: Conversations for Action—speaking which evokes commitment to act within a certain time with specific conditions of satisfaction.

I request
I promise
Will you?
I decline
I counteroffer
I commit to commit later

- **Conversations from the Past**

Examples: Descriptions, Explanations and Assessments—they offer to provide evidence or argument.

4. Theory: Definition of Terms

ENERGY is the strength and vitality required for sustained physical or mental activity. Synonyms: vitality, vigor, life, liveliness, animation, vivacity, spiritedness, verve, enthusiasm, zest, vibrancy, spark, sparkle, effervescence, ebullience, exuberance, buoyancy, sprightliness.

MUTUALITY: The density of the Space between people varies from completely clear/transparent/open/empty to completely dense/closed/blocked/full. Mutuality is a continuous area that is relatively free, available, or unoccupied with the quality or state of being mutual. Attitudes, values, principles, beliefs, thoughts, fears, emotions, ideas, preconceptions, orientations, cultures and identities can occupy the space. Mutuality reduces the density of the space between people. Mutuality makes Space between people less dense by introducing: Breathing alone or together, Present Awareness, Overview Consciousness, Ability to shift mindset from victim to cause in the matter, Intense presence of nature, questions that create new possibilities, Embracing Paradox, Promising what you cannot predict, Meditation, Absence of Force, Absence of Explanation, Absence of Transaction, Generous Listening,, Speaking from the Heart, Committed Speaking, Eliminating Noise, Contemplation, The intent to “Inter-Be,” Beginner’s Mind, Zero Gravity, Not being a Noodle in Someone Else’s Soup.

CURIOSITY is the urge to know more about something. The state of being curious includes inquisitive interest in others’ concerns, wondering, ready to poke around and figure something out. In mathematics, a square is the result of multiplying a number by itself, e.g. two times two. In Curiosity among individuals or groups, squaring is the acceleration of the experience of mutual wonder such that “I” becomes “Us.” Accelerating Curiosity is an energetic phenomenon. Its nature is neither linear nor conceptual.

5. A General Theory of Collaborative Innovation

“There is nothing as practical as a good theory”. – **Albert Einstein**

ENERGY (E) = equals MUTUALITY (M) x CURIOSITY SQUARED (C²)

“In the presence of wonder, awe, inspiration, love, vibrational energy, mystery, and inexplicable wholeness, anything becomes possible.” – **Charlie Smith**

Making A Dent in The World: Breaking New Ground – Steve Jobs’ Advice

- **Do Something Different to Anything that has been done.** Collaborative Innovation is everything. A business, government, economic and relational system that is successful, sustainable and consistent with how human beings really are.
- **Ally with Kindred Spirits.** Others with shared values that often see things differently from others.
- **A few Key Products:** Put the ‘A-Team’ on each product. What are you saying ‘no’ to? “It’s so simple, a 2-year-old can use it.” Our audience does not care about our product. They care about themselves, their hopes, their ambitions. If you help them reach their dreams, we win them over. Be different because instead of just pragmatic benefits, the experience would talk and what are you doing to enrich the lives of your audience.
- **Master the Message.** Be a great storyteller. Instead of simply delivering a presentation like most people do, inform, educate, inspire and entertain, all in a presentation.

6. Applications and Experimental Programs

- **Campbell Soup of Canada** was sure to lose much of its Canadian manufacturing to the United States without radical cuts in cost. Leaders and workers feared one another. The culture was uncooperative. All but two manufacturing plants were saved and remained in Canada.
- **Cunard Ellerman** shipping lines was a merger of two shipping companies, one large, one small, and both desiring to expand business, cut costs and create a singular harmonious and communicative culture.

It became a harmonious single culture with financial savings, and having had a graceful transition.

- **IBM.** In a service division, poor performance and cooperation led to a crisis need to reduce 500 products produced in five different countries to one computer screen, the need to simplify processes, save as many jobs as possible, maintain identity and self image in each country, not become servants of the United States, and resolve serious conflict within the leadership group in the United States and between countries
- **The Rouse Company** operated 70 shopping centers around the US and Canada. Many shopping center managements were dysfunctional. Communication was unreliable and dishonest between centers and headquarters. There was an industry-wide recession not seen in many years. The executive vice president said that he would no longer work in a place where people did not tell the truth, were not open and honest in their communication, and would not commit to breakthrough goals with each other and independently. He promised to take this on with commitment and vigor or leave. His division had the best few years in history and innovated many new ways of working.
- **The US Air Force** was mandated with other companies and agencies to design and fly an airplane from a runway to fly 17,500 miles an hour; an impossible goal never before

achieved. Ten thousand people across the U.S. were involved. Breakthrough thinking and uncharacteristic actions were required. Significant progress was achieved before Congress removed funding and shifted the money to the military and private companies.

- **The president of a large energy company** wanted to become CEO and the existing CEO did not want to leave for five years. The challenge was to make this happen politically and with grace. If it did not happen, he intended to leave the company in eight months. After creative and effective strategy, the existing CEO committed himself to leave in one year and did so.
- **An Admiral in the Ministry of Defence in the British Navy** was in charge of a large agency responsible for all military pay and insurance programs. He had a dysfunctional and misaligned senior team and knew that shared intention and increased harmony were absolutely necessary in the future they wanted. There was no alternative and he was not confident that he knew what to do that would really work. With Collaborative Innovation, they achieved previously impossible alignment and brought coherence to the system and themselves.
- **The head of a Canadian division of a global pharmaceutical company** had been judged as middle grade performer in another country and transferred to Canada to prove himself. He was determined to take radical action and do whatever was necessary to have Canada become a leader in the entire corporate world. In the next year, they came to be number three in the global companies in most of the world and were recognized for the quality of their culture and employee engagement scores.
- **The leader of a Proctor and Gamble manufacturing plant in the north of England** wanted a dramatic increase in performance and a collaborative culture. In a short period of time, they were tripling their machine efficiencies and employees were so excited about now appreciating the new way of working, they independently and unilaterally went to other manufacturing plants in the United Kingdom to help other employees take advantage of what had been learned.
- **A global consulting company in England** in their government affairs division went through an intensive individual coaching of the leader who aspired to bring his personal values for performance and human culture into the company and really meant it. Financial growth, creativity, and people seeking work there increased dramatically over a number of years.
- **The National Industrial Distribution Association** in the United States was shrinking in size every year. Gross margins kept going down. Many were going out of business. Small companies were absorbed into large companies at a rapid rate. A lot of people lost their jobs. It was bleak. When I first met with the Association leaders, they felt helpless as a group, and as individuals. Almost as if grasping at straws, they began a Strategic Visioning Program, in sets of meetings, they created a number of moonshots, breakthrough projects, new ways of working with one another, and convincing media. It soon became clear that some companies were doing well while most others, except the very large ones, were doing poorly. It also got clear that what made the difference was their speed, imagination, boldness, and willingness to collaborate with themselves

and their clients. At the end of a year many were moving forward innovatively and collaboratively at the same time as people and as companies.

- **The National Peace Academy Campaign** was the vision of a man named Bryant Wedge. The dream was to create a national academy at the level of West Point, Annapolis, and the U.S. Air Force which was devoted to research, practice and action in the areas of nonviolent dispute resolution in the United States and around the world. The idea was to create a national ethic of waging peace with equal conviction to the capacity for violence and war. There were critical challenges in managing volunteers, relating to and negotiating with members of Congress, lack of money, and continuing resistance from the Defence Departments, Schools of Foreign Service, Arms Manufacturers, certain media, and many members of Congress. On one hand, it seemed like Don Quixote tilting at windmills and on the other hand a noble, while and committed purpose with leaders who really meant it.

The original mission was to have the U.S. Congress create a Commission to study the viability and merits of such an effort. The National Peace Academy Campaign was a low-budget, largely volunteer, effort to enable this. My role was to help build teams, coach and counsel leaders in breakthrough thinking and creative ways to engage in constructive conflict resolution. Our deeper role was to act as a “conscience” for all of them to bring together the ethics of their values and the powerful politics and opposition that would naturally come from the Defense Department schools of foreign service, media, and certain members of the Congress.

In fact, the commission bill was passed with a \$500,000 grant and after a year of negotiation, forward movement and sacrifice of some of the original principles Congress passed a bill to create the National Institute of Peace which is now a beautiful building with extensive world conflict resolution research and facilitation located on the Washington Mall. We did not accomplish the vision and it was a strong step in the right direction.

All of this personal and business energy expansion led to countless life altering and leadership development experiences for individuals. These activities also lead to positive transformations in marriages, contributions to communities, churches, and individual’s sense of well-being and purpose in their lives. Another consistent result was in break through leadership training for individuals of great benefit to the companies and careers.

7. Innovative Collaboration

Four Quartets – T.S. Eliot

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

*A condition of complete simplicity
Costing not less than everything*

*And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flames are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one*

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