

# COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

A talk given at the 2nd Public Sector Women in Leadership Summit 2015

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**What is it • Why does it matter • Why it is the future of leadership**

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## **Ray Chambers - collaboration in action**

Ray Chambers demonstrated the power of collaborative leadership. Not long ago, malaria was killing more than a million people a year. Half of them were children under the age of five.

Ray Chambers pulled together a team who fundraised three billion dollars to build enough insecticide treated bed nets for all vulnerable families in Africa.

As a result, global malaria deaths have been reduced by more than 45%, eight African countries have cut malaria incidence by more than half, mosquito net ownership has risen from around 3% to 53% and since 2001 over three million children's lives have been saved.

## **Why should you add Collaborative Leadership to your management toolbox?**

The world in which we lead is very different than it used to be.



**Globalisation** – global markets exist and even if you're a manager in the public sector, you will be experiencing the forces of globalisation.



**People** – especially millennials, are increasingly searching for meaning in their work. There's a greater need for connection, for people to *feel* their power.



**Technology** – Information is available to everyone, at our fingertips. There are fewer secrets and greater transparency than ever before. Information is abundant, accessible and no longer the precious gem to be hoarded away.



**Social networking** – the power of social networking is also phenomenal. Whole movements can start with a single tweet. The internet has drastically increased our ability to communicate and collaborate, globally and instantaneously.

**Perhaps most importantly, our basic human urge to work in groups (we are, after all, tribal beings) is realised more easily now than any other time in history.**

We are more interconnected, more interdependent than ever before. Never in our history has there been more demographic changes, greater differences in socioeconomic well being and such alarming environmental challenges.

**And never has there been such a lack of confidence in the ability of our leaders and institutions to address these challenges.**

Unfortunately, most organisations (and that includes the NZ public sector for the most part) are still leading as though we are existing in the slow moving and simplistic environments of yesteryear.

Many of us carry the image of leaders as the all-knowing superhero archetype, who stands, commands and protects his or her followers. Who tells them what to do, how to do it and has all the answers on the right way to do things.

Most leadership and management structures and approaches stem from the military. This command and control leadership approach is based on models where the top generals develop the strategy, the officers translate the strategy into action plans and soldiers execute it. It's this leadership approach that is, for the most part, the one that is adopted by organisations.

We create a corporate hierarchy of reporting lines.

We allocate specific roles and responsibilities.

This hierarchy is then controlled and managed by a top executive.

## The Emphasis?



**Exert control.**



**Hierarchical structures and processes.**



**The leader as the superhero archetype.**

## What's wrong with that?

Command-and-control structures place too much responsibility on too few leaders. If we were to take a quick look at your position descriptions and the typical list of competencies we expect from leaders today, you'd start to see a frightening picture emerge.

It becomes pretty clear that what is expected are super humans - people who need to excel at strategy, analytics, problem solving, financials, marketing, psychology, operations and innovation.

# Last time I looked, these super humans are in short supply.

With such demands placed on the few leaders at the top, it's not surprising they run out of capacity to lead and make effective decisions. No single person has the capacity to meet the diverse challenges that you're facing as organisations. Particularly when you have such a diverse range of stakeholders as the public sector.

## The emphasis needs to be on **leadership** *not* leaders.

### *What is Collaborative Leadership?*

**Collaborative leadership** is a management practice which is focused on the leadership skills across functional and organisational boundaries.

#### 5 villains of collaborative decision making:



1. The unchecked ego.



2. Homogeneity and not cultivating diversity.



3. Hoarding information. Treating information as power.



4. Unwieldy organisational and management processes that stifle collaboration.



5. Not modelling from the top.

#### Antidotes:

1. **Be aware and subjugate your ego.**

- Almost always go last with your idea or opinion. Or at the very least, rarely go first.
- Have regular “what if” creative brainstorming sessions. Scenario planning without boundaries is a great collaborative approach.
- Be the recapper only. Give no input.
- Leave the room!

2. **Cultivate diversity: In gender, age, perspective and in every other way. Don't let your processes kill diversity.**

- Share information and implement approaches such as crowdsourcing. Ask, “what information am I currently holding to myself, that if I was to share with my team or even broader stakeholders, could unleash innovation, creative problem solving or increased productivity?”

3. **Ensure your management approaches help, not hinder, collaboration.**
  - Be a great coach.
  - Ask more than you tell.
  - Listen more than you speak.
  - Get skilled and comfortable at giving and receiving feedback. Do it every day and avoid the annual dump truck appraisal.
4. **Ensure managers (*especially at the top table*) are rewarded for collaborating rather than promoting their individual agendas.**
  - A collaborative mindset at the top table will cascade down to the rest of the organisation. Ask whether you have competing agendas. How can I unify my direct reports goals towards common goals?

## Collaboration is not about being nice.

The rhetoric of markets can make words like collaboration, partnership and cooperation sound like soft options in a world that can seem increasingly competitive, uncertain and hostile. But make no bones about it, the reality is that collaboration can be extremely demanding as a leader, relying on a set of sophisticated skills to be successful.

It's not just about aligning disparate interests into a common purpose. Sharing control and putting the future of your organisation or department partially in the hands of others, who have different ways of working and skills to your own, is tough work.

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**Want to learn more about how collaborative leadership skills can support your leadership journey?**



Attend one of our **Collaborative Leadership In Action** workshops in 2015! For more information and workshop dates, email [suzi@mc Alpinecoaching.co.nz](mailto:suzi@mc Alpinecoaching.co.nz)

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