

Book Review

By Sue Fontannaz

The Collaborative Leader: the ultimate leadership challenge.

Authors: Ian McDermott and L. Michael Hall (2016)

Carmarthen: Crown House Publishing.

Leadership is challenging and complex and the leadership literature proliferates. Against this backdrop, collaborative leadership has emerged as an approach to addressing the key challenge that emerging leaders face: how to lead others in a way that taps into our social need to belong and be connected. We are neurologically wired to collaborate in a competitive world.

In their new book, *The Collaborative Leader: the ultimate leadership challenge*, the authors Ian McDermott and L. Michael Hall explore the challenges of leading collaboratively in depth. Instead of focusing on the theories behind collaboration, *The Collaborative Leader* offers a practical guide to demystify the art of collaboration and provides a methodology for leaders to collaborate with others. Their collaboration provides a step by step guide for leaders and coaches with practical and immediate exercises to develop this critical leadership competency to grow relational and social capital. By introducing collaborative leadership as a journey, the authors invite leaders and coaches to engage in this critical leadership challenge. The book acts a virtual guide, to support emerging leaders, self-managing teams, leadership and team coaches as they experience the joys and challenges of collaborative leadership. Coaches understand that collaboration is the foundation for developing and empowering others, be it with teams or leaders faced with the challenges of working within a team context. The insights can inform reflective practice for coaches, to enhance this core competency for others. There is also the opportunity to reflect on collaborative leadership when negotiating the complex, coaching relationship with organisations, to resolve any competing priorities.

The focus of the book is on three main considerations about collaboration and leadership: What is collaboration? How does it relate to leadership? How do you do it effectively?

The book is structured into sections that explore the foundations of collaborative leadership, to provide conceptual clarity and inform practice. The starting point is self-collaboration, as this inside-out process encourages leaders to develop authenticity by integrating different aspects of the leader's identity. The process then progresses to understanding how collaboration is distinct from consensus and co-operation and that conflict is inherent within the collaborative process. The prisoner's dilemma is used to illustrate the tensions that exist between competition and co-operation – two forces that influence collaborative leadership. Further, the book highlights that collaboration is a core skill of leadership; and that leadership is essential for collaboration to occur. The benefits and challenges of collaboration are both explored to encourage emerging leaders to reflect on how they can develop a culture that supports team collaboration and encourages a team spirit to emerge.

Thought provoking questions, examples and models are offered, which can inform both coaching practice and leader development. The pre-requisites for collaborative leadership are

outlined and checklists are offered so that collaborative leadership capacity can be benchmarked. By offering practical examples, and exploring what can go wrong, the authors offer a lens on collaborative leadership that encourages reflective practice and insight. The appendices include self-assessments and benchmarking exercises to encourage reflective practice on collaborative leadership. The authors offer clear insight into the challenges of collaboration and draw attention to how collaboration can go wrong, by offering insight into pseudo-collaboration, identifying the barriers to effective collaboration and identifying when collaboration is in crisis. The authors also explore how a collaborative culture encourages creativity and empowers teams, to more effectively contribute to a high-performance culture that taps into our need for purpose and meaning in our work.

Anecdotal evidence from the authors' extensive experience is also offered to contextualise the work. Both authors have amassed extensive experience working globally with leaders and teams in the field of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP). Ian McDermott has authored 15 books on NLP, coaching and systems thinking, whilst L. Michael Hall, a cognitive psychologist, has authored 40 books on NLP and produced a series on Meta-Coaching. Their experience is evident throughout the book, which seamlessly integrates real world examples to support the conceptual frameworks and assessment models. The book is written in a mentoring style and the writing is personal and accessible. They have professionally identified principles and skills in a way that is pragmatic enough to be useful for coaches, leaders and organisational development consultants.

A key revelation of the book is the recognition that collaborative leadership encourages positive emotions, such as fun and enjoyment, as people discover their creativity whilst respecting difference in the collaborative process. The authors also exemplify a collaborative style, by signposting other key texts that support collaborative leadership, which offers both emerging leaders and coaches perspective on which authors are contributing to this leadership approach.

What sets the book apart for me is that it explains why and how collaborative leadership works – to offer deeper insight into the broader benefits of well-being that collaboration offers. The book is relevant for any coach working with leaders and teams, particularly in areas of self-managed teams, where collaboration forms the basis for effective teamwork. Coaches can make use of the practical toolkits offered in the book to support leaders in developing collaborative leadership to engage teams in creatively contributing to make work more meaningful.

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