

WHAT IS COLLABORATION

By Stan Rowland

Ways groups work together

There are four different aspects in which groups work. Each has different characteristics.

- Connection: Is the ability to develop relationships with others and to share information. The question becomes what people will do with that information.
- Coordination: Is the ability to act in concert with one another. This normally accompanies an agreement to share information.
- Cooperation: Is marked by the desire for mutual gain. Each party has something to contribute so both parties can achieve a positive outcome. They agree to team together and not go forward without each other.
- Collaboration: Is the ability to multiply each others strengths to produce a result that no party could have achieved alone. Newer, never before seen capability, opportunity, are the hallmark of true collaboration. Each member will contribute to the mutually agreed upon objectives and goals. The outcome is "we did it together".

If any of the above is to function the stakeholders must first identify what is important to them and what adds value to the work they are already doing. They need a strong commitment of what to mobilize around and what is the common vision. In addition there needs to be a strong champion and facilitator who leads the movement forward.

CNT is a collaboration aimed at uniting those many diverse organizations interested in the transformation of individuals, communities and nations in a wholistic ministry

What is collaboration?

- In simplest terms it is the act of working together.
- It is something more, it is working together to accomplish more than any one person or organization could do alone.
- It is much more than just trying to find common ground on which to act.
- It is about bringing out the best in the group and helping them to reach a higher ground. It is about increasing the capability of the whole.
- It is the ability to multiply each other strengths to produce results no party could achieve themselves.
- Newer, never before seen capabilities, opportunities, and successes emerge from successful collaboration.
- It takes your strength and my strength and maximizes them.
- It is a highly disciplined way of moving from idea to action. It involves the discipline to listen, not to pre-judge what others are saying, and to ask questions based around asking "why" instead of "how".
- It lets people operate at a constant high level of innovation.
- It requires a beginner's mind that does not have pre-conceived answers to questions and problems.
- The "Aha, I see" moment is an indicator of true collaboration.

- It is a simultaneous change of individuals and organizations.
- For collaboration to happen there must be enough freedom to achieve the goal, with very few outside restraints.
- It is about having real live conversations about the things that are important and not shelving the ideas that people are afraid to discuss.
- It concentrates on the positive and builds on that. Affirmative Inquiry is at the center of discussions not SWOT.
- It is always based upon relationships of trust, love and commitment to the advance of God's kingdom.

Why form a collaborative effort?

- It is a relational way of operating between organizations who desire to see change take place.
- Much more can be accomplished through the combined effort of the entities than can be accomplished alone.
- It cuts down on the tendency to reinvent the wheel as people and organizations learn from each other.
- It encourages the use of complementary gifts and allows pooling of resources.
- Fewer resources are used as organizations draw upon each others resources to accomplish the agreed goals.
- Christian networks help to promote the Body of Christ which is a witness to the rest of the world.
- It allows you to develop the real power and potential within the group.
- New ideas come from letting people work things out themselves. This is an attribute of the whole, not of the individual members.
- It multiples greatly, 20, 30, 40, 50, 100 fold are the results of groups over individual results.

Key elements in collaboration

- For a collaborative effort to be strong, all members must have a strong commitment to a common vision and purpose that drives their work. The CNT commitment is to a wholistic view of the world and health. CNT realizes health is not curative medicine but includes all areas of life.
- The organizations that form the collaboration are legally independent entities that sometimes behave as a single, larger entity for their own self interest and for accomplishing their common purpose.
- Their unified purpose is the glue and driver for their existence.
- They are independent members who stand on their own.
- There are voluntary links between the members and the collaboration grows by adding links. This makes growth omni-directional.
- There are multiple leaders, fewer bosses but more leaders. Each group in the collaboration has something useful to contribute at some point in the process
- Collaborations are multi-level, multi-dimensional not a flat organization.
- Collaborations are continually growing and expanding as more and more commitment is generated by the individual members towards their unified purpose and new members are added.
- There should be frequent interactions and communications which builds

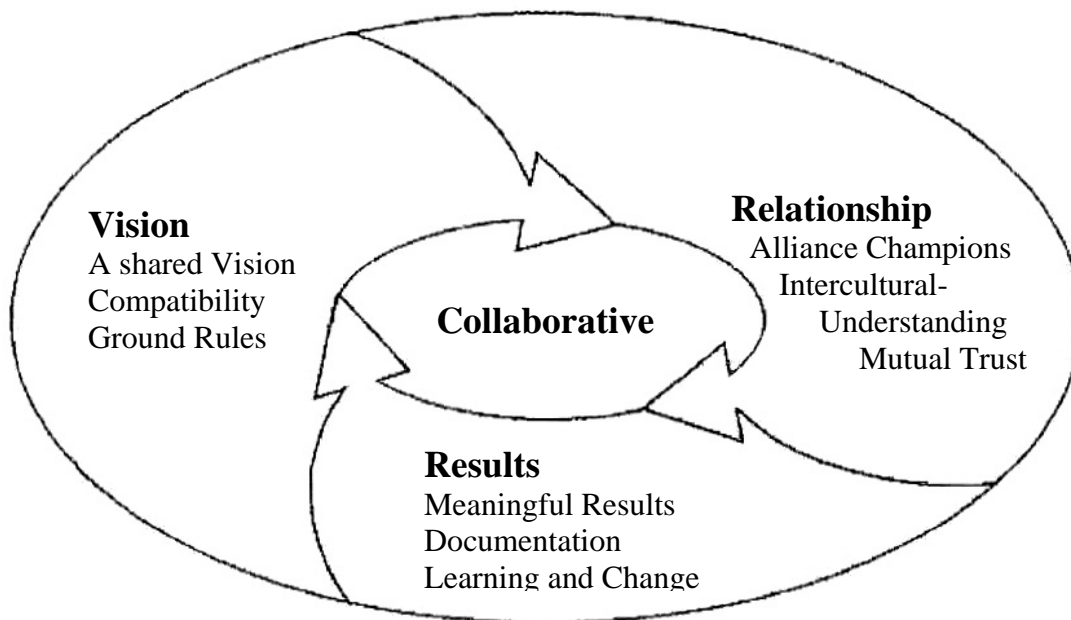
the collaboration and action.

- The purpose of the CNT is to cause change in all areas of people's lives.
- Control by one or two elements towards centralization of the collaboration will cause its demise.
- Relationship building and trust is crucial for the establishment of a strong collaboration that works towards accomplishment of their common purpose.

A collaborative effort is similar to a partnership

For a collaboration to cause change they hold a similarity to a partnership between organizations. For a partnership to work there are three imperatives which must be in place and continually interact. They include:

- Must have a shared vision
- A strong relationship between partners
- Should result in meaningful results



| | Imperatives | Questions |
|--------------|-----------------------------|--|
| VISION | Shared Vision | What has God invited us to do together? |
| | Compatibility | What binds us together? What could tear us apart? |
| | Ground Rules | How do we work together? |
| RELATIONSHIP | Collaborative Champions | Who is responsible to make it work? |
| | Intercultural Understanding | What cultural differences may help or hinder the relationship? |
| | Mutual Trust | What gives confidence in each other? |
| RESULT | Meaningful Results | What difference will it really make in the work of the gospel? |
| RESULTS | Documentation | How do we keep track of agreements, contributions, and outcomes? |
| | Learning and Change | How do we handle changes, opportunities, and disappointments? |

Five key elements of collaboration

- Unifying purpose: Shared commitment to the same goal, not legalism, holds the organization together. This is the glue holding the collaboration together. This created by a very clearly defined and agreed upon purpose for the collaboration which extends from the abstract to the concrete.
- Independent members: Each organization is different. Each retains its independence while cooperating with others on specific tasks. There is a healthy independence for each organization.
- Voluntary links: They communicate extensively and meet often. No one is forced to participate. There are many crisscrossing relationships. There are expansive relationships among people and extensive connections through technology.
- Multiple leaders: Different people and organizations lead, depending on what needs to be done. During any given process, more than one person leads. There are fewer bosses and more leaders who take the lead position when appropriate.
- Integrated levels: People work on many levels and within itself and other partner organizations in the collaboration that itself is part of the nuts and bolts work which is embedded in the larger collaboration of relationships. There are groups within groups nesting internally in many collaborations.

