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# Leading by Collaboration

*Collaboration finds a place where, feasibility for competition diminishes. In this competitive world, while the geographic barriers, language differences, cultural variations, conventions are no more the reasons to prevent companies from serving the society globally, what is quintessential is more of collaboration, joining hands and aiming for a win-win among the like-minded souls. However, Leading by Collaboration is a different skill, which demands a different package of traits. The Social Entrepreneurs are known for and ought to master the skill of networking and collaborating with like-minded people.*

Taking a few cues from the business world, the associations like OPEC, OECD, SAARC, *Keiretsu*,... what do these have in common? Each of these is an association, or an organization or a confederation of several individual entities, which have come closer to optimize available resources and maximize desired results. The resources available are limited and the demands (individual as well as organizational) are enormous. Hence, it is difficult if we tighten our belt and launch a one-man hunt for expected results. Gestalt's psychology suggests, that, whole is better than the sum of parts. It is better to analyze the whole and identify the strengths of the group as such, than identifying the strengths of each and then trying to sum

it up as a whole. In other words, the leader should adhere to systemic thinking and foster collaborative culture. The researchers of Kellogg, in a presentation on collaborative leadership, say that the purpose of leadership in 21st century is to create a congenial climate where people can thrive, grow and live in peace and develop individually as well as in groups. The attention should be to promote harmony with nature and thereby provide sustainability for future generations, to foster the culture of reciprocal care and shared responsibility, where every person matters and each person's welfare is respected and supported. Hence, considering the growing need of more teamwork, and collaborative atmosphere, the employers/entrepreneurs should lay thrust on transforming followers into partners, co-leaders, life-long learners and collaborators. The study, observations and inferences aptly hold good to the Social Entrepreneurs too.

As collaboration experts, they believe in motivating employees intrinsically, by invigorating the passion and desire to accomplish projects; by aligning them with the vision and the goals of the entrepreneur. Communication style of the collaborative leaders differs from the others. Collaborative leaders spend significant amount of time in the routine, while listening to others. When it is for Social Entrepreneurs the rigor involved may only increase, as they represent a different breed of entrepreneurs and for a different cause with a different modus operandi. Glory Alexander of Asha Foundation observes, "I would say yes, it requires a lot of effort. You got to go and meet up the individual corporates and talk to them, explain the work you are doing. But over the years it has been help from quite many corporates – providing donation for our work. Asha foundation is deeply involved in the collaborative initiatives networking with other NGOs working in the field of HIV such as MYRADA, GRIDO, Yuv Chetna, Seventh day Adventists, Methodist Church of India, Bangalore University, REDS, Don Bosco, INSA etc., (Source: [www.ashaf.org](http://www.ashaf.org)).

Asha, under the entrepreneurship of Dr. Glory Alexander is linked to several corporates, supported by state government. She observes “in order to overcome this disease, definitely the role of corporate, the role of Government, role of NGOs, role of Civil sector, is pivotal and everybody needs to join and make an effort to overcome this issue.”

Research says, an ideal entrepreneur should spend around 60-70% of time in his routine listening to the people around him. The leader is there to listen to the ideas, grievances, suggestions, explanations etc. The Social Entrepreneur is also connected to the outside entities like government, corporates, communities etc.

## **The Collaborative Partners**

### **CSR and Social Entrepreneurship – Towards a Win-Win**

If one takes a look at the corporate scenario 10-15 years back, the corporates were also working in a very protective environment. And their sole interest was maximizing profits. But now corporates are also becoming more global and CSR is the buzzword among the corporate parliaments. Corporates are slowly trying to understand what Social Entrepreneurship really means. Ravi Agarwal of Toxics Link in this context says, “I think they (Corporates and Social Entrepreneurs) have to go together. Otherwise we can’t arrive at any sustainable solution. Corporates are very important actors. But they also need to speed up the process of seeing that new market access, social responsibility etc.”

Many corporates today are keen on expanding their scope of interest towards social development as well, not limiting their role to commercial interests. This extended role of corporates certainly offers an opportunity for the Social Entrepreneurs to draw a win-win with the corporates. While the business houses are involved principally, in business, Social Entrepreneurs can facilitate them by sharing their

missions and the approaches towards social development proactively. Social Entrepreneurs have a big role to play in making corporates aware. The corporates in turn have been showing their readiness to fund such missions with a philanthropic bent.

However, it is observed that sometimes it is a difficult task as there are still many corporates confronted by the old attitudes towards philanthropists. However, according to Social Entrepreneurs, in the long run, both corporates and Social Entrepreneurs have to learn to work together more than what they have been doing in the past.

When asked about a possible win-win between the corporates and the Social Entrepreneurs, Dr. Janaki Rajan of SCERT – an Ashoka recognized Social Entrepreneur says, “they already play a role. The corporates are very keen to fund whatever the Social Entrepreneurs are doing. For example, the work we do in SCERT, Ratan Tata trust is supporting the projects. Azim Premji foundation was very keen to support. Now both are corporate social initiatives. They (the corporates) don’t want to start from scratch, and hence they are always looking for people who are already into the social sector”.

Rohit Baluja of IRTE has a similar experience to share when asked about the corporates’ involvement in the social development. He asserts that many of the corporates want to participate on the social front. He shares “Many of my programs have been in association with the corporate world. For example, today the student-traffic volunteer scholarship scheme of university students of Delhi was held successfully with support from organizations like BP Castrol and National Foundation, Hyundai Motors and Delhi Traffic Police”.

However, Dr. Janaki Rajan observes that the individuals who start as Social Entrepreneurs are very often merged with the organizations promoting corporate social responsibility. And no denying the fact that this is a big loss to the community of Social Entrepreneurs as

they lose their entity and are camouflaged with a different identity. One must understand that both the entities (Corporates and Social Entrepreneurs) are equally important to lead the mission of social development. Both the entities should respect and appreciate each other's roles and responsibilities and let there be a win-win between the two.

### **Collaboration with Government**

Government is another major prospective source to collaborate with the Social Entrepreneurs. Government, in fact, has a better reason to collaborate with the Social Entrepreneurs as one of their prime interests is social development and mitigating the gap between haves and have-nots. Hence, Social Entrepreneurs can in fact facilitate Government in a big way by sharing their plans towards social improvements with a quid pro quo arrangement. In fact, the Government-Social Entrepreneur collaboration is not something unexplored. Anil Shaligram of *One Village One Computer* shares his experience with the government "We have alliances with government. Department of science and technology has been helping us through our science awareness from 2004. There were sympathetic panchayats (Village Heads) with which we work. In addition, within the IT corporate sector, we have contacts in many corporates and many individuals are also helping us in a collaborative mode."

Recently, M S Swaminathan's "Mission 2007" with a vision of "Every Village a Knowledge Centre" tied up with government. The fiscal Budget 2005-06 has also allocated Rs.100 crore for the project and reportedly they are going to setup the mission in 2007 including more than 1 lakh IT sectors throughout rural India. M S Swaminathan is behind the mission and Anil Shaligram has partnered with M S Swaminathan Research foundation.

### **Tie Up with Community**

Anshu Gupta of GOONJ observed that the stocks of daily necessities such as clothes, utensils, medicines, toys etc., which usually lie as idle and redundant surplus in the houses of rich can be converted into a substantial economic resource for the country if channeled efficiently to the rural poor. Thus he founded the organization GOONJ, which is driving a countrywide movement to motivate and manage a massive transfer of used household articles, from riches to the poor (Source: [www.ashoka.org](http://www.ashoka.org)). Anshu, in order to ensure that the articles are reaching the desired end has instilled in place, an impeccable communication network assuring the donors of the successful transfer to the goods. Anshu while describing his modus operandi says, “people want to get rid of it (excess goods), but on the other hand, people have spent their hard-earned money, on that. So we need a channel where they understand that it is going to the right place, and right people. To ensure the same, we have very strong communication system. The process involves collecting material, sorting according to weather, age, and gender. On the other hand, we started looking for reliable networks, including NGOs, Panchayats, even Individuals. As a part of the due diligence process we started partnering with communities working from various parts of the country facilitating the reach of the goods to every nook and corner of the country. Advantages of this model are manifold. These native people are much more aware of the geography, the demographic features than us as they work with them. They know much better and a stringer rapport with them facilitates effective communication”.

### **Integrated Collaborative Model**

Madhav Chavan of Pratham has a collaborative strategy in place called the *Triangular Partnership* comprising corporates, government, and the citizens. The Social Entrepreneurs should also make a smart

approach to the collaborations and should know how to bring the entities close and at what stage of the state of affairs. One can certainly take a leaf from Dr. Chavan's experience. Dr. Chavan initially thought that he would bring all the three partners together. Accordingly, the Pratham trustees formed these different sectors. Unfortunately, Dr. Chavan realized, all three coming together doesn't make a compatible representative body. Dr. Chavan realized that these are different people coming from different sectors put together and he should approach the government or the corporate sector to do things differently, when a plan is prepared. Hence, Dr. Chavan brought in a change in his collaborative strategy as he says, "we work with government to get the plan approved and then we approach the corporate or other donors to get the money. Alternatively if the corporate sector is willing to fund some work in a city or in a district then we approach the government and say the money is available would you like to do this programme. Then we collaborate with community and the volunteers so that the citizens can participate." That is how Pratham has been carrying out its social development programs with a well-designed and executed integrated collaborative strategy.

Pratham is well connected to the corporates to ensure that the vision of Pratham gets adequate exposure. This is evident when Dr. Chavan says "Our Second crucial collaboration is with ICICI, after Mr. Kamath chairman of ICICI bank, joined hands with Pratham. We built a strong partnership with ICICI bank. They were a strong corporate support. Not only in terms of funding but Mr. Kamath also started campaigning the cause of Pratham to other corporates, which was important in the building up of links later on. That was in the year 1997." Then the third collaborative effort by Pratham was in 1999-2000 when the government of India, secretary of education invited Pratham to hold a presentation to all secretaries of different state governments and presented a model on how governments and people can work together. Dr. Chavan says,

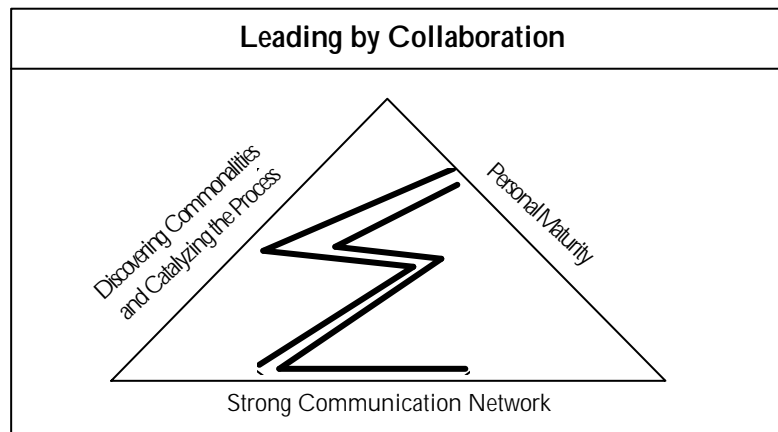
“Thanks to that; then we started talking to different NGOs, governments across the country.”

In my co-authored book with Dr. Daniel Elash titled *Leadership Imperatives* we discussed the characteristics of a collaborative leader, which aptly fits in the role of a Social Entrepreneur and hence deserves to be discussed in the context of Social Entrepreneur too.

### **The Model “Collaborative Leader”**

#### **Unadulterated Concern for Development and Clarity of Context**

A collaborative leader works with selfless and a genuine concern for developing people. He works with a passion to bring the best out of others by capitalizing other’s latent and untapped talent. Unlike the traditional leaders, collaborative leaders use power to share the power and empower the potential leaders in alignment with the organization’s interest. The collaborative leader must have a concrete clarity with respect to his vision, mission, goals and objective. His communication to others must be clear and immaculate, which is possible only if he is convinced with his knowledge and clarity on his objective.





## **Discovering Commonalities and Catalyzing the Process**

Collaborative leaders are under a constant search for birds with like feathers. A collaborative leader should be vigilant and good at identifying the common threads among the groups and try to create common platforms for like-minded people. One must remember, the competition was yesterday's story. Collaboration is tomorrow's way of ensuring survival in the business. Imagine amidst such a competition, huge demand and limited resources of petroleum, if countries or companies start operating individually with autonomy. Price wars – unregulated production – disequilibria in supply and demand; ending up in chaos. Hence, they felt the requirement of regulating the production, process and the business cycles. And thus formed OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) to coordinate and unify the petroleum policies of member countries. OPEC plays a vital role in ensuring the stabilization of oil prices and securing an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consumers. catalyzing the process as said earlier, collaborative leader is not primarily interested in bagging the kudos for all the execution. Rather, they are more engaged in bringing the resources together and identifying the common thread passing through all the resources and making them realize that they stand on a common platform. His job is to create passion among the employees and catalyze the process of execution.

## **Personal Maturity**

Collaborative leaders are not afraid of issues like loss of control, and transfer of power etc. They are more interested in the excellence of the group. Their bottomlines are broader and deeper than the usual materialistic ambitions. The collaborative leaders are personally matured. They exercise personal leadership than positional leadership. Robin Sharma, author of the celebrated book, *"The Monk Who Sold his Ferrari"* sees leadership as not a set of guidelines or a book of

rules or enchantment of mantras. Leadership, as he feels, is a complete overhauling of a personality. According to him, leadership is a process and not an activity. Leadership is a process of observing thyself, correcting thyself and living in accordance with the laws of the nature. Thus, he recommends personal leadership before leading some one else; improving and overhauling yourself before leading or transforming others, and it is all our thinking that makes it so. Fear of pain or failure is a conditioned response, which is instilled in us since childhood, which takes a toll on our positive energy, creativity, confidence, and in turn offers worries, apprehensions, and failures. Instead, the state of fearlessness offers indomitable strength and unlimited potential and personal maturity. Robin here reveals one more secret that fearlessness makes a person look younger and healthy. Collaborative leadership demystifies the definition of leadership to the future leaders. Amidst the cutthroat competition and business breaking all the geographic barriers with the forces of globalization and liberalization, no one person or company can afford to declare himself/itself as a leader. The players will be compelled to identify the common thread among the various players and create a common platform to give the best to the consumers and reap the best of the dividends collectively. The time is not far off, when competition reaches saturation and the corporate leaders begin to realize the significance and indispensability of collaboration with the fellow players and thus, foster the culture of collaborative leadership.

### **Strong Communication Network**

One of the prominent features of Social Entrepreneurs is their commitment to communication. They establish a strong communication networks with related communities, which help them in collaborating quickly and building a lasting relationship.

Ravi Agarwal, a Delhi based Social Entrepreneur, heading Toxics Link while narrating his communication network shares “We are based

in Delhi. We have about 35 people. We have three people in Chennai and one in Mumbai. We have a strong information communication outreach team, where we do both networking with grassroots and we play the role of information exchange. We use all kinds of media; electronic media like websites and also direct information sent out and query response. One might send us a query and we make it sure to respond. That is like direct information dissemination.” Ravi also organizes his own campaigns and programme areas.

Toxics Link is divided into four programme areas. It deals with issues like biomedical waste, municipal waste, asbestos and electronic waste and pesticides in food safety. They do research on the ground and also work with many other groups with a strong communication network. Ravi recognized that there is no enough capacity in civil society to deal with these issues. Hence Ravi and his team try and network with others and help them to get the capacity. Toxics Link has networked with several like-minded resources around the country with several partners. They also make policy interventions. Ravi says, “We communicate with the government and the private sector to gather what needs to be done to improve some of these issues. We also network internationally. We are also part of some of the key civil societies around the world working on these issues and also with organizations like WHO, UNDP, and several other apex organizations at international level.”

While those were the tenets of a collaborative leader, the collaborative style of leadership, they have a crucial role to play in the mission of a Social Entrepreneur. Collaboration and networking with various groups in the society is probably the only way a Social Entrepreneur can translate his dream into reality.

***At a glance...***

- The leader should adhere to systemic thinking and foster collaborative culture.
- The entrepreneurs should lay thrust on transforming followers into partners, co-leaders, life-long learners and collaborators.
- Social Entrepreneurs believe in motivating employees intrinsically, by invigorating the passion and desire to accomplish the projects; by aligning them with the vision and the goals of the entrepreneur.
- Many corporates today are keen on expanding their scope of interest towards social development as well, not limiting their role to commercial interests.
- Government is another major prospective source to collaborate with Social Entrepreneurs. Hence the Social Entrepreneurs can in fact facilitate government in a big way by sharing their plans towards social improvements with a quid pro quo arrangement.
- As a part of the due diligence Social Entrepreneurs should partner with communities working from the various parts of the country facilitating the reach of the services to every nook and corner of the country.
- Social Entrepreneurs should carry out their social development programs with a well-designed and executed integrated collaborative strategies comprising the corporates, government and the communities as their partners.

