



**Collaborative
Leaders
Network**

Worldview

By Papalii Dr. Tusi Avegalio

*From A Collaborative Strategy
Grounded in Polynesian Values*

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Worldview

Given the diversity of the human experience, it is only natural that people come to the table with different values, assumptions, and beliefs. On the surface, individuals appear to be islands, separate and apart from each other. Accordingly, Western strategies for working with a group of people are often built on the assumption of their separateness and isolation. By reframing the context to look below the surface, individuals lose their singularity and become one with the greater whole; from this perspective, the design and experience of cross-sector collaboration is quite different.

The conventional focus of a collaborative process is tied to deliverables that advance organizational goals and can be arrived at efficiently. Processes that engage the intellect and follow a structure that is efficient and controllable continue to dominate the way collaboration is taught and designed. A far cry from these models of leadership and facilitation is one that sets about addressing the intangible needs of people to be treated with respect, compassion, and kinship.

Borrowing from the ancient practices of traditional Polynesian cultures, the starting point here is conjuring a spirit of collaboration among the stakeholders; this element needs to be in place prior to launching into the group's agenda and before engaging the more tangible goals that drive an organizational process.

Indigenous Polynesian cultures approach group work with a mental template that is organic rather than mechanistic. Farmers and gardeners start the growing process by cultivating; similarly, a collaborative process should start with cultivating relationships. By meeting with key stakeholders one by one, the leader gains a sense of who each person is and begins to build a foundation of mutual trust and respect that will be necessary for working well together in the future. On an energy level, it involves gathering and channeling each person's *mana* and then disbursing that energy so that the group is imbued with *faaaloalo* and *aloha*; only then are participants truly ready to collaborate. When this transformation happens, productive thinking and a sense of wholeness are likely to follow.

According to Samoan beliefs, the highest goal is to be at peace. A person has peace when he is aligned with all four harmonies: with the cosmos, with nature, with fellow man, and with himself. Each harmony is based on a covenant; the covenant between oneself and one's fellow man is based on *faaaloalo* and *alofa*.

Each person has a different capacity to receive and deliver *faaaloalo*. The highest form of *faaaloalo* is unconditional, where someone gives it naturally and willingly. For some people, *faaaloalo* can only be earned through reciprocity; it must first be extended before a person can respond.

If an individual's *faaloalo* is low, it does not mean that he or she should be excluded from a collaboration; in fact, it may be more important for this person to participate. When this is the case, efforts are made to extend *faaloalo* and *alofa* to the person throughout the process. The individual who is the recipient of this trust, respect, and love, has the potential to be transformed by the experience, and become more capable of giving back in return.

At the heart of this collaboration model is the belief that all people have an internal sense of relationship and connection. The process is conceived as a way to help people recognize their sense of kinship with others and with life in general. As the awareness of connection and relationship is awakened in each individual, so is their *feagaiga*, or "covenant with others." In the course of working with a group that reflects *malu alii*, individuals gain access to their own spirit of collaboration ... which, in reality, has always been there.

