

# The Promise, and Challenge, of Leading in a Networked World

*The future is already here; it's just not very evenly  
distributed.*

—William Gibson

Something powerful is happening in the United States. Public and nonprofit organizations that have typically worked on their own and created incentives for their employees to do likewise are now creating partnerships and rewarding collaborative behaviors in new and creative ways. Here are some examples.

## “The Future Is Already Here . . .”

### In the Arts

Nonprofit arts organizations have long struggled for financial support in this country. Too often they have struggled alone. Today some are sharing space, staff, and even information about funders in an effort to improve their bottom lines and programs. More than that, they're finding that co-locating (sharing the same physical space) generates creative ideas for new programs (more on this trend in Chapter Eleven).

### **In Law Enforcement**

Information sharing is always a critical need in the law enforcement community. LInX (Law Enforcement Information Exchange) is a regional law enforcement information-sharing program developed by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service that is meeting that need. LInX helps state and local agencies electronically share law enforcement records and analyze information. Member agencies include state and local police departments, county sheriffs, U.S. Department of Justice agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), U.S. Department of Homeland Security agencies, and criminal investigative service agencies in the armed services.

Participating agencies provide information on crimes, suspects, arrests, and so forth, to a centralized data warehouse. Law enforcement officers can quickly access LInX to gain information from multiple jurisdictions. LInX also helps agencies collaborate on joint investigations. Because of this network, LInX partners no longer have to check multiple databases to pull together information on a suspect or crime. LInX has helped law enforcement officials to find suspects accused of sexual crimes, kidnappings, assaults, and other illegal acts when no other database could provide a “hit.” As of 2009, there were more than 500 law enforcement agencies in the LInX program, with approximately 25,000 authorized users sharing data.

### **In Human Services**

In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the *Patch* approach emphasizes service integration for children and families. Patch (a British term for neighborhood) assigns an interdisciplinary team of nonprofit and public-sector staff to work with families in need in each given neighborhood. The families get to know and trust the staff, who view themselves primarily as part of their team, not as members of separate agencies. Team members exchange information regularly

on their shared clients. They also work with the natural helping networks in the neighborhood (churches, clubs, neighbors), some of which become *partners* to the families in need. Perhaps most important, Patch team members take an *integrated* approach, viewing each family as a whole and dealing with the family through its members' own geographical and social networks.

### Through the Web

The development of *Web 2.0*, the highly interactive tools that enable consumers to post, edit, and discuss content on the Web, has been breathtaking. Today, people with no special technology skills can determine the contents of news Web sites like digg.com, edit the content of the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, exchange comments on their department leaders' blogs at the Department of Homeland Security, and post videos about innovations on the Coast Guard's YouTube channel.

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*One of the major trends on the Web is creating a sense of community.*

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One of the most significant Web trends is the way these new Web tools foster a sense of community among users. When Craig Newmark created craigslist, he wasn't looking for a quick buck. Rather, he wanted to make it easy for people to advertise what they need to buy or sell. And did he ever! Today, craigslist receives 3 billion page views a month. All ads are free (except for businesses posting job listings). Craigslist users frequently refer to it as a community; users interact with each other without direction from someone in charge (there is no one person in charge).

### Among Unusual Suspects

And it's not just agencies partnering with like agencies. One of the intriguing trends involves agencies partnering with *unusual suspects*—groups that appear to be unlikely partners. The U.S. Bureau of the Census partners with over 140,000 groups for the

decennial census. For example, in partnership with cities like Los Angeles, it trains sanitation, utility, and other city workers to spot people who might be living in the city but wouldn't normally be counted (looking for signs of converted garages, multiple TV antennas, multiple mailboxes, and the like). The result? Over 38,000 nonstandard dwellings were confirmed in LA for its 2000 census, adding significantly to the city's population count.

### **Among Public and Nonprofit Funders**

And many funders, from small private foundations to local United Ways to huge federal agencies, are insisting that grantees must collaborate in order to receive funding. One of the most exciting examples is in the area of biomedical research. "Fed up with the glacial pace at which new discoveries become medical treatments, . . . [some funders] are insisting that the scientists they fund swear off secrecy in favor of collaboration" (Begley, 2004). Gail Johnstone, former director of the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, notes the same trend in the nonprofit world. By the start of this century relationships among many nonprofits were "way beyond communication and coordination. There was a widespread culture among nonprofits in which funders were saying, 'collaborate, collaborate, collaborate!'"

### **“. . . It's Just Not Very Evenly Distributed”**

These examples point to the good news. Yet even with the explosion of collaboration successes, there continue to be failures and missed opportunities. And that's the bad news. Sometimes it's the tragic news. On April 16, 2007, a mentally unbalanced Virginia Tech student named Seung-Hui Cho killed thirty-two students and faculty before taking his own life. The Virginia Tech Review Panel spent months studying the incident and found that many professors

at Tech realized that Cho was in serious trouble and spoke up to senior school officials, yet little was done to deal with his needs and his threat. As the panel concluded: “During Cho’s junior year at Virginia Tech, numerous incidents occurred that were clear warnings of mental instability. Although various individuals and departments within the university knew about each of these incidents, the university did not intervene effectively. No one knew all the information and no one connected all the dots” (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007, p. 2).

And there were many dots to connect. After Cho was accused of stalking two female students in December 2005, a Virginia special justice declared him mentally ill and a danger to himself, and ordered Cho to get outpatient treatment. He never received the treatment, although he sought help three times at the University’s Counseling Center; and nobody at Tech took responsibility to see that he did, although one English professor tried desperately to get him into counseling. The order to seek treatment wasn’t entered into the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, and that meant Cho was able to buy the two guns he used in the shooting spree. In one class that Cho attended, most of the roughly thirty other students stopped attending because of Cho’s bizarre and sometimes frightening behavior (he was finally removed from the class).

Noting the information silos that existed at Tech, a law professor who met with the Virginia Tech Review Panel said, “There was no single person, office or team that oversaw the whole process for troubled students at Tech. Nobody was in charge.”

That last sentence bears repeating: nobody was in charge. As public administration scholar Don Kettl writes, “the intersection of the American constitutional separation-of-powers system with federalism ensures that no one is ever fully responsible for anything” (Kettl, 2009, p. 61).

## Dealing with Complex Challenges in a Networked World

If the good news is that there are many exciting examples of collaboration from which to learn and the bad news is that we have a very long way to go, the challenging news is that there is little choice anymore. “The 21st century will be the age of alliances,” predicts James Austin (2000, p. 1), who studies nonprofit-corporate partnerships. Goldsmith and Eggers (2004) write that “governance by network represents . . . trends that are altering the shape of public sectors worldwide” in their insightful book *Governing by Network* (p. 9). Abramson, Breul, and Kamensky (2006) include networks and partnerships as one of “six trends transforming government.”

Why the huge emphasis on collaboration? There are many factors, but perhaps the most significant has to do with the *complexity* of the challenges facing public and nonprofit agencies today. Pick up a newspaper or check your favorite news Web site, chances are you’ll be reading about issues that are enormously complex:

- Pandemics
- Global economy
- Narcotic trafficking cartels
- Kids who struggle in school
- *Nonstate actors*, such as Hezbollah and other terrorist groups
- Global warming
- Piracy (!)

These and other problems require multiple skill sets and mindsets. One of the most significant realities of our networked age is this:

*The most significant challenges facing our society cannot be addressed by any one organization. They all require collaboration among many organizations.*

### **Hurricane Katrina Reveals the Challenges and Promise of Collaboration**

A profound example of complexity requiring collaboration began on Monday morning, August 29, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. It was the costliest and one of the five deadliest hurricanes in U.S. history. Billions of people around the world watched in disbelief as the world's superpower seemed astonishingly unable to save the inhabitants of a major city. Close your eyes and no doubt you can still conjure up images of desperate people clinging to the tops of their houses, pleading for help as the waters rose.

Government at all levels failed the people of New Orleans despite the valiant efforts of thousands of people who worked countless hours to save the city and its citizens. Most of the subsequent anger focused on the federal government's emergency management agency, FEMA. Many reasons have been offered for FEMA's dismal performance: it lost its independent status when it was moved to the Department of Homeland Security in 2003; the FEMA director no longer had a cabinet-level position, thus losing direct access to the president; post 9/11 the agency was primarily focused on human threats, not natural ones. Each of these is true, but there's another critical factor.

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*Michael Brown's main problem was his mindset; he thought his job was to manage FEMA.*

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In the months after Michael Brown was fired because of FEMA's poor performance during Katrina, he argued that he had managed FEMA well but couldn't control other agencies outside his span of control. Seems reasonable at first glance, no? Actually, Brown's statement reflects a mindset totally inappropriate to his task. As Don

Kettl (2009) has argued, Brown's primary job during the disaster was to *develop partnerships* in order to take care of the storm's victims and get the city running. To borrow the term used by the basketball coach mentioned in the Introduction to this section, Brown lacked court vision. He didn't accept the task of creating an alliance with the other players who had to be involved in the game.

This broader job definition wasn't a radical notion at FEMA. Indeed, one of the many gifts that James Lee Witt brought to FEMA when he led it from 1993 to 2001 was his emphasis on forging partnerships with local communities (for a thorough look at FEMA's use of networks during the 1990s, see Waugh, 2004). Witt's successors stopped emphasizing partnerships. They defined the job as managing a hierarchy, not developing a network of partners. A number of potential partner organizations around the country contacted FEMA to offer assistance after the storm struck. Tragically, many such offers weren't taken.

Katrina is the poster child for all that can go wrong when complex challenges aren't addressed by a collaborative response. Multiple agencies with overlapping jurisdictions quarreled and pointed fingers as people died; an out-of-state manager helping with the cleanup counted at least six New Orleans agencies that had independent police authority. Relationships that should have been well established prior to the storm were weak or nonexistent: a senior emergency management official was stunned to see some members of Governor Blanco's cabinet introducing themselves to each other at a special state cabinet meeting held soon after the storm hit. Lessons learned from training exercises designed to prepare the city for a huge storm were ignored.

Before you throw your arms up, don't despair. There's also a wonderful side to the Katrina story that needs to be emphasized.

### **Thad Allen—A Different Leader, a Different Mindset**

On Friday, September 9, 2005, Thad Allen, an officer of the U.S. Coast Guard, was appointed principal federal official in charge of



search, rescue, and recovery efforts during the post-Katrina period, replacing Michael Brown. His no-nonsense demeanor started to create a sense of confidence. Despite extraordinary challenges, Allen and his colleagues were able to slowly start turning things around.

Over the course of the next three weeks, thousands of people were rescued from New Orleans, most of them by the Coast Guard. A sense of order was returned to the city, rescue and recovery efforts were better coordinated, and many of the key political players who'd been pointing fingers at each other just after the storm hit were starting to cooperate. Allen received considerable credit for this improvement. How did he do it?

- One of his first moves was to invite a number of his most trusted colleagues to work with him in New Orleans. Virtually all said yes. Then, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco issued a blistering statement criticizing the federal government for failing to retrieve bodies from New Orleans waters. Allen ignored the White House when it urged him to bash Blanco. Instead, he called her and asked, "Governor, have I done something to give you the impression that I'm interested in anything else but helping the people of Louisiana?" (Kitfield, 2005, p. 1). That call helped soften her criticism and bought a little time.
- Within twenty-four hours of arriving, he and Army lieutenant general Russel Honoré established a planning group that met daily (Honoré was commander of the Katrina Joint Task Force). The two also reported daily to New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and Governor Blanco on their goals for the next day. They kept political leaders informed and involved at every step. Allen told those reporting to him that they were "to treat every citizen they helped as if they were a family member" (Newcomer, 2006, p. 14).
- In both symbolic and substantive ways, Allen acted on one of his favorite sayings: "Transparency of information breeds self-correcting behavior." *Allen is a strong believer that "transparency of information breeds self-correcting behavior."*

behavior” (Kitfield, 2005, p. 1). He told reporters that he would meet with key rescue officials and other stakeholders, have an open discussion, create a clear direction, and move on out. He opened up the recovery process to the media, inviting the media to become partners in telling the public what was being done to help the residents.

- Allen, who was promoted to Commandant of the Coast Guard in 2006, relied on an approach refined by the Coast Guard over the years: focus on *strategic intent*. Rather than develop detailed plans, he sought agreement with partners on a general direction and major priorities, determined who was responsible for what, gave partners great flexibility, and emphasized constant communications.
- Allen defined his role as coordinating a huge network of agencies. His team leveraged about 130 boats from other organizations. They got local responders to share knowledge of the city with those who came from out of state. They worked closely with a variety of state, local, and federal government agencies and nonprofits that arrived to help.
- Throughout, Allen and his team emphasized open, ongoing communications. He focused on the partners’ agreed-upon results, not on policies and procedures. The preexisting relationships with the individuals he brought from the Coast Guard were also critical to dealing with an unprecedented emergency.

### **Michael Brown and Thad Allen: Hierarchical and Collaborative Mindsets**

As painful as Katrina was (and still is), its lessons are powerful for anyone interested in collaboration. Table 1.1 captures the key differences between Brown’s and Allen’s approaches for dealing with the great storm. My point isn’t to portray one as a superhuman hero and the other as totally responsible for inept government responses

**Table 1.1. Dealing with Katrina: Comparing the Approaches of Michael Brown and Thad Allen.**

	<b>Michael Brown</b>	<b>Thad Allen</b>
Focus	Manage his agency.	Lead a network.
Key assumptions	Can only use formal authority to accomplish goals.	Can use relationships, influence, the media, and peer pressure to achieve goals.
	Need senior leader support to succeed.	Need strong partnerships pulling in same general direction to succeed.
	Go by the book.	Be flexible, use requirements of the situation to set your course.
Communications	Control the message tightly.	Shine a light on the operations; show the public your work.
Political power	You gain power through access to senior leaders.	You gain power by listening, speaking truth to those with power, making good on the promise, and delivering results.

to a massive disaster. No single person was responsible for either the failures or the successes (of which there were many). The reason for contrasting Brown's and Allen's leadership styles is simply this: their performance during Katrina reflects key differences between the bureaucratic hierarchical approach and the collaborative approach.

*Note:* For an excellent discussion of the different approaches Allen and Brown used in New Orleans, see Kettl, 2009.

## Two Overriding Collaboration Challenges

As collaboration veterans know, there are many hurdles to successful collaboration (see Exhibit 1.1), and most of them were reflected in the Katrina episode. Collaborative leaders like Thad Allen are far more effective at dealing with these challenges than are leaders who think in hierarchical terms. Here I'd like to describe two mega-challenges to collaboration: our organizational structures and systems and our individualistic nature.

### Trying to Solve Twenty-First-Century Problems Using Eighteenth-Century Structures

If we get up to 30,000 feet and survey the collaboration landscape, it becomes apparent that one of the biggest hurdles to collaboration lies in the very DNA of our public and nonprofit organizations. To put it simply, we're trying to address complex, twenty-first-century problems using eighteenth- and nineteenth-century organizational structures and systems. These rigid forms are vestiges of another, more stable era. They reflect industrial-era thinking. Goldsmith

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#### Exhibit 1.1. Common Collaboration Hurdles.

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- Egos
  - Turf
  - Fear of losing control, autonomy, mission, resources, quality
  - Different cultures
  - Lack of trust or history of antagonism between the parties
  - Lack of resources or competition for resources
  - Power imbalances
  - No perceived reward for collaboration
  - Lack of time
  - Different goals among the parties
  - Silo mentality
  - Concern that exchange between parties won't be reciprocal
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and Eggers put it well in *Governing by Network* (2004): “Rigid bureaucratic systems that operate with command-and-control procedures, narrow work restrictions, and inward-looking cultures . . . are particularly ill-suited to addressing problems that often transcend organizational boundaries” (p. 7). In addition, for a variety of reasons, the services and information provided by our public and nonprofit agencies are frequently *fragmented*.

That fragmentation enormously complicated the rescue efforts after Katrina hit; thousands of people were working their hearts out to save lives, yet each of their agencies saw only part of the problem. An assistant fire chief from northern Virginia who worked for several weeks in New Orleans reflected that “the government and recovery effort was very fragmented. There was a total disconnect between city, state and federal efforts. . . . The groups working there were independent and didn’t endorse a holistic approach to the overall recovery effort.” Public and nonprofit agencies often have difficulty trying to take a holistic approach to their challenges. There are many reasons why this is so (see Figure 1.1).

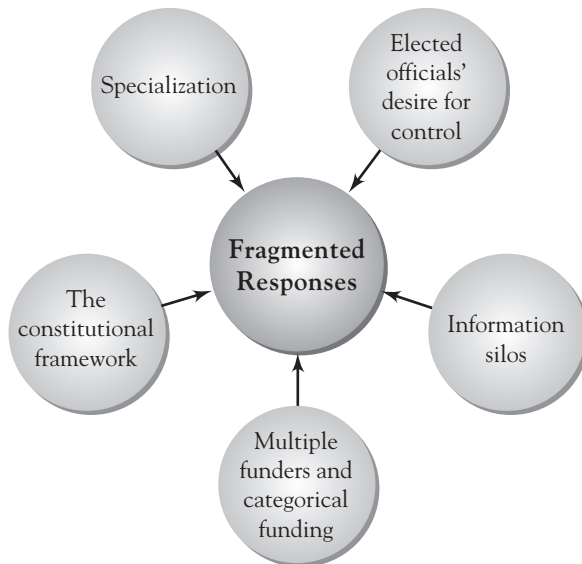


Figure 1.1. Causes of Our Fragmented Organizational Responses.

### *The Constitutional Framework*

The framers of the U.S. Constitution had one overriding purpose: to prevent tyranny, either of another king or of any one arm of

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*The framers' strategy of separating power has prevented tyranny but has also made it incredibly hard to solve complex challenges.*

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government. Their main strategy was *separation*; three separate branches of federal government, separate powers through checks and balances, and a further division of power between the federal

government and the states. It was a brilliant solution. It suited our inherent distrust of government. There's just one problem: dividing power into so many slices makes it incredibly hard to tackle big challenges. And we live in an environment of extremely large and complex challenges.

Our strategy of separation results in the proliferation of public and nonprofit entities, often doing similar work. To cite just one example, in Iowa there are over 1,000 general units of government (cities, towns, counties, school divisions, and so forth). Of that state's ninety-nine counties, eighty had fewer than 30,000 people as of 2006. But when Governor Tom Vilsack proposed merging some localities to increase efficiency and reduce the costs of redundancy (every jurisdiction has its own administrators, jails, police, and other functions), the state legislature quickly shot the idea down. When power is fragmented across so many units, we end up in situations where, to paraphrase the late cabinet secretary and Common Cause founder, John Gardner, there are 100 people who can veto a project, but no one person or office that can move it forward.

### *Multiple Funders and Categorical Funding*

The way we fund social services, health care, and certain other programs contributes to fragmented services. When foundations and government provide separate funding for programs dealing with such problems as drug use, child abuse, gangs, and teen pregnancy,

the result is a myriad of specialized services, each of which addresses one part of the problem. This (non)system of funding developed for understandable reasons: parents, advocates, providers, and public and nonprofit funders focus on specific needs of high-risk populations, and they don't want resources for their cause mixed into a larger pot where their interest could be lost. Thus individual programs develop intense and powerful constituencies, but those programs are often too narrow and fragmented to work.

One study of programs serving at-risk students in Los Angeles found 238 separate programs, each serving one aspect of the students' lives. As Lisbeth Schorr (1997) writes, "categorical funding that divides services into small, isolated pieces has made it almost impossible to prevent trouble before it starts" (p. 81). This kind of funding is a major challenge for service providers who want to take a holistic approach. The creative Patch program described at the start of this chapter, in which people from multiple disciplines and agencies form a team and work together closely to provide integrated services, is a delightful exception.

### *Specialization*

As we gain more knowledge about certain technical issues, the professionals in that area inevitably specialize. That's appropriate, but it requires systems and processes that synthesize the specialized knowledge for the client. If you or a loved one has had a serious illness, you've experienced this issue. When an older cousin of mine became critically ill, his family dealt with different specialists who offered different diagnoses and different treatment options. The family needed a strong advocate to get the physicians to talk (and, even more challenging, to listen!) to each other, and they needed a wise internist to help them develop a holistic plan.

Lisbeth Schorr (1997) documents the same problem in human services. She describes a meeting with three professionals who were working with the same family. The social services counselor

was concerned about the teenager's gang involvement, the school social worker focused on the seven-year-old's school absences, and the school nurse worried that both kids continually came to school with very dirty clothes. And the mother? She was upset that they'd gone six weeks without electricity in the house! Moreover, each professional knew of that problem but noted that it wasn't in his or her job description to call the power company. As Schorr comments, "Workers concentrating on specialized functions often lose sight of the family as a whole" (p. 82).

### *Elected Officials' Desire for Control*

It's difficult to keep track of the number of committees and subcommittees in Congress, but it's not difficult to understand why there are so many. Control of committees and subcommittees conveys power: over money, over staff and priorities, and over policy development. When committees use their power to create separate programs for favored causes (each with its own staff and sometimes its own senior agency official), that only adds to the fragmentation of services.

Congress also contributes to fragmentation by making it difficult for agencies to share costs when working together on joint programs. As John Kamensky, former federal executive and Senior Fellow at the IBM Center for The Business of Government points out, a provision in federal appropriations law prohibits cost sharing on joint projects unless one agency is designated the executive agent or project owner (and when one agency is in charge, others are sometimes reluctant to share costs). Some agencies have received Congressional approval for cost sharing, but obtaining this approval is often a long, tedious process. Congress also adds to fragmentation through its committee process; when dozens of committees and subcommittees have control over parts of an agency, they sometimes send conflicting signals to the programs they oversee.



### *Information Silos*

Our tendency to compartmentalize information is well known. Some strong leaders, like Thad Allen, are able to overcome or manage the problem, but every leader struggles with it. *The 9/11 Commission Report* emphasizes the problems caused by poor information sharing in the months prior to the 2001 attacks. It states that the “biggest impediment to all-source analysis—to a greater likelihood of connecting the dots—is the human or systemic resistance to sharing information” (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 416). A good deal was already known about the nineteen men who attacked our country on that horrific Tuesday morning, but the information held by one agency wasn’t given to another or it was shared but got lost at some middle-management level or it was disclosed but in an overly compartmented fashion.

Each of these factors fragments information and service delivery, but none of them is insurmountable. Indeed, this book details cases of collaboration that overcome every one of them. The Virginia Retirement System developed ways to eliminate information silos in the 1990s (Chapter Ten). The analysts in a virtual team in the intelligence community work in different agencies but integrate their specialized knowledge seamlessly to help defend the country (Chapter Nine). Through the INEAP partnership, public and nonprofit managers in agencies that support small businesses are overcoming their different categorical programs to provide integrated solutions to shared clients (Chapter Six). Fusion centers are co-locating staff from all levels of government, nonprofits, and private-sector firms to share and analyze critical information and communicate it to first responders (Chapter Eleven). Washington State has even found a way to bypass the duplication of services created by thousands of units of government; the state has a powerful method for holding agency heads from different levels of government accountable for common goals (Chapter Twelve).

These and other examples can give us hope and teach us important lessons about surmounting the structural problems in our service systems. But there is another mega-challenge, not written into organizational charts but equally important: it's the individualism that's coded in our mental software.

### **Coping with the Expectations of a Highly Individualistic Society**

Geert Hofstede, an anthropologist who has studied the cultures of over seventy countries, uses questionnaire data to identify their distinct natures. One of the factors he studies is the degree of individualism or collectivism in a culture, which is closely related to the ease of collaboration.

In individualistic societies, people are expected to look out for themselves and their immediate families. In collectivistic societies, people are integrated into strong extended families and in-groups from birth and are expected to give them strong loyalty. Here are some more specific core expectations:

<i><b>In Individualistic Societies</b></i>	<i><b>In Collectivist Societies</b></i>
Look out for yourself (and your family).	Take care of the group.
Speak your mind.	Maintain harmony.
Be independent.	Be interdependent.
Recognize that the individual is responsible and gets credit.	Recognize that the group is responsible and gets credit.

Table 1.2 shows the scores of selected nations on the individualism-collectivism dimension. The higher a country's score, the more individualistic it is. Of over seventy countries surveyed, the United States has the highest level of individualism—91 out of a potential 100. Although these numbers are striking, they shouldn't surprise us. American leaders from Jefferson forward

**Table 1.2. Individualism Scale Scores of Selected Countries.**

Country	Score	Rank
USA	91	1
Great Britain	89	3
Italy	76	9
Ireland	70	15
South Africa	65	19
Israel	54	28
India	48	31
Japan	46	Tied for 33rd
Mexico	30	Tied for 46th
China	20	Tied for 56th

*Note:* The higher a country's score, the more individualistic. For the complete listing of scores on this dimension and the other cultural dimensions, see Resource B.

have preached the importance of “rugged individualism.” When French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville came to the United States in the 1830s to learn how democracy was working in the largest country yet to try it, he was struck by our strongly individualistic natures: “[Americans] acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands” (Tocqueville, [1835] 1956, p. 194).

Tocqueville expressed great admiration for Americans, but he worried about the excessive individualism that democracy was creating in the new nation: “[democracy throws every person] back forever upon himself alone, and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart” (p. 194). In their wonderful study of American individualism, Bellah and others (1985) concluded that “[i]ndividualism lies at the very core of American culture” (p. 142).

In many ways our individualistic streak has served us extremely well. The implications for collaboration in the United States and other highly individualistic countries, however, are challenging. Collaboration, after all, is about co-labor, not individual effort.

## We're Also a Nation of Joiners

But there's another narrative to the American experience, one that Tocqueville also documented. This perceptive Frenchman described ours as a society filled with "voluntary associations" and concern for the public good. He noted that we're a nation of joiners, that when we get upset about something in our community we organize with others in order to take action. Tocqueville's great contribution was to note this ongoing tension or duality in American life—we embrace both a strong individualist ethic *and* a desire to join together for common purpose.

Psychologists David Waters and Edith Lawrence came to a similar conclusion from a different vantage point. Reflecting on their decades of experience with individuals and families in therapy, they identified two fundamental human needs: mastery and belonging. They argue that most people need to feel a sense of competence or mastery in some part of their lives and need to be recognized for that competence. People also need to be part of something larger than themselves, to belong to some group or organization or movement that reflects their core values.

Tocqueville discusses individualism and voluntary associations. Waters and Lawrence use the terms mastery and belonging. Different words, similar concepts. I believe there are two fundamental needs at play here: for *autonomy* and for *connection*. Collaboration helps meet the need for connection, but it seems to be at odds with the American urge for autonomy.

## Me Versus We? Or Both?

“People must simultaneously be ‘me,’ an independent individual, and ‘we,’ an interdependent part of groups.” That’s the claim of Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps (1997), two experts on networks and virtual teams. “Each of us grapples with an inevitable and continuous tension between the need to *differentiate*—to enhance our individuality—and the need to *integrate*—to bond in groups” (p. 112). *Autonomy and connection are complementary, not contradictory, needs.*

Their conclusion: cooperation requires individuality.

To reframe Lipnack and Stamps’s words a bit, the two divergent themes in American life—individualism and collectivism or autonomy and connection—aren’t necessarily contradictory. Rather, *me* and *we* are complementary parts of our psychological makeup. Many of us, including the most individualistic, have a strong desire to connect with something larger than ourselves. And, when that “something larger” is a collaborative team, team members can meet both the *me* and *we* needs as they contribute their special talents and unique knowledge and experience to a successful group project.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

Collaborating across boundaries can be deeply exciting and maddeningly difficult, both uplifting and confusing. It calls on our best instincts and requires us to push back at some of our basest motives. The challenges to collaboration are wired into the very DNA of our organizations, and into our psyches. Yet the problems facing us in today’s interconnected world can only be addressed through intelligent collaborative responses. And as

Thad Allen's example demonstrates, when we get it right we can lift spirits and save lives.

Fortunately, we have many examples of collaboration to study. The media are all too good at highlighting our collaboration failures, of course, and we do need to understand them. But it is more important to understand why some collaborative efforts succeed. Chapter Two describes one such example. It's about a collaborative leader, Roosevelt Johnson, and his extraordinary efforts to increase the numbers of minority students entering graduate school. Johnson, like Thad Allen, has a collaborative way of thinking. He also uses the principles that are present in most successful collaborative efforts.