A "writing out loud" excerpt from the working draft of "Collaborating with the Enemy: An Open Way to Work with People You Don't Agree With or Like or Trust" by Adam Kahane, forthcoming in 2017 from Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Chapter 4: The Route Cannot Be Known

"Walker, there is no path. The path is made by walking."—Antonio Machado

Halfway through our project on immigration, the going again got difficult. The larger political context within which we were operating was becoming more polarized. The diverse group we were supporting had deep disagreements about the content of the report they were writing about what was happening and could happen. They were frightened that when the document came out they would be seen by their constituents to have compromised and would be embarrassed. They were uncomfortable with our conflictual, collective, collaborative process and did not trust that it would produce a worthwhile outcome. Most of them were worried, some were outraged, and a few quit, with others threatening to follow.

Several of our other project efforts—to organize expert input, to recruit additional participants, to raise funds—had also run into problems. Members of our support team were tense, with some blaming others and defending themselves. I was nervous about losing face and influence and not getting paid.

The project was not going as I had planned and expected and I didn't have the power to force it to be the way I wanted. I wasn't sure on which matters to be confident and resolute and on which to be concerned and open. I didn't know what, if anything, would work.

The limits of rationality

The experience I had in this project is typical of tough collaborations to deal with complex challenges. We are co-creating a way forward. We cannot know our route before we set out; we cannot predict or control it; we can only discover it along the way. This can be exciting and also frightening.

This experience is, however, completely different from the way I used to think that such efforts were supposed to unfold. When I had studied energy and environmental policy and had worked in my first corporate planning job, I had learned a conventional technocratic model with three steps: think through the problem, the solution, and the plan to execute the solution; get these agreed by the people in charge; and then instruct people to implement the agreement. When I later worked with Kees van der Heijden, I had seen that this model was the foundation for conventional strategic planning which, he noted, "falls into 'the rationalist school,' which codifies thought and action separately. The tacit underlying assumption is that there is one best solution, and the job of the strategist is to get as close to this as possible

within the limited resources available. Having decided the optimal way forward, the question of action (known as the 'implementation issue') is addressed."

When I tried to implement this rationalist model in tough collaborations, however, I discovered that it did not work. People who come together, because of and in spite of their differences, to work on an issue that matters to them, in practice almost never follow these three steps—even if they think they are supposed to. They often produce useful outputs—new relationships, insights, commitments, initiatives, and capacities—but they rarely do this through executing a pre-agreed plan. Sometimes they produce some outputs and sometimes others; sometimes they end up doing something close to what they originally intended and sometimes they make radical changes; sometime they are only able to work together briefly and sometimes they end up continuing for years; sometimes they move forward in alignment and sometimes in fierce contestation. They have to figure out what to do as they are doing it.

For a long time I thought that the unpredictability of collaborative projects could be remedied by being more explicit or disciplined about the model: by doubling down on planning and control. But eventually I realized that the model I had thought was normal just does not fit these efforts. It would be nice if the familiar and straightforward rationalist model worked for tough collaboration. But it doesn't.

An emergent model

Over the past decade, my colleagues and I have gradually discovered another model that is more useful in tough collaborations. I saw this other model in action in a 2012-13 project on the problem of illegal drugs in the Americas.

The starting point for this project was the observation that over the last 40 years, most governments around the world have pursued variations of the same singular strategy to deal with drugs. This strategy, "the war on drugs," centers on the prohibition of the consumption of certain listed drugs, the interdiction and destruction of drug supplies, and harsh criminal sanctions for offences. This strategy has been implemented through the strict enforcement of three international drug control treaties and related national and local laws, with global spending on the drug law enforcement of more than $100 billion per year.

Alternatives to this established strategy have been practically undiscussable in official policy debates. But notwithstanding this enormous investment of energy and resources, the problems associated with drugs have remained stuck, with continued high levels of addiction, criminality, corruption, incarceration, and violence. The vision of "a drug-free world" that was articulated 20 years ago by the United Nations has not been achieved.

Over the last ten years, some political leaders, especially in North, Central, and South America, have started to question this war on drugs strategy. One of the most outspoken of these has been Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos. In November 2011, he said, "On this issue we sometimes feel that the world is pedaling on a stationary bicycle. We keep fighting against drugs, but the drugs continue to flow." In international fora he repeatedly

made this point and said that he was searching for a way for drug policy to get unstuck and move forward.

I had worked with Santos on Colombian security issues since 1996 with my colleagues Joaquin Moreno and Gustavo Mutis of the Bogota-based Center for Leadership and Management (in Spanish, CLG). In February 2012, the four of us conceived a project to bring together a team of international leaders to look into alternative options for drug policy. In April 2012, Santos proposed this project to a summit of all of the presidents and prime ministers of the region. They agreed and assigned the project to the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington DC.

This is how, from May 2012 to May 2013, the OAS, CLG, and Reos Partners ended up working together to run an ambitious and innovative policy project. The Secretary General of the OAS, José Miguel Insulza, was pleased to have received this important mandate but surprised to find that my colleagues and I were to be involved. The OAS's usual way of working was to seek agreements through formal, rationalistic negotiations among its member governments. CLG-Reos was pushing to produce options through an informal generative collaboration among diverse governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. Both the OAS and CLG-Reos wanted to be in control, but because of the way the project had been set up neither could. So we had to find a way to collaborate.

Our work together started off with high level of mutual suspicion and continued over a full year with vigorous talking and fighting. For me this was an intense project because it was high stakes and high profile and because I needed to work with people with whom I often did not see eye to eye. I found the experience both exhilarating and exasperating.

The core of our project was working with a team of 46 leaders from across the countries of the Americas and the sectors involved in drug policy: politics, security, business, health, education, indigenous cultures, international organizations, the justice system, and civil society. This team met for two three-day workshops in Panama City in January and February of 2013. Their primary task was to agree on a set of scenarios about what could—not what would or what should—happen in and around the drug problem. This specific framing was crucial because it enabled the members of the team, who had radically different and entrenched positions on the problem and the solution, to shift their conversation from a usual, rigid one about whose position was right, to an unusual, fluid one about what was possible.

My colleagues and I focused on organizing the project so as to help the team depart from downloading their habitual positions, and to connect and think and act freely and afresh. The workshops included expert input, field visits, small group work, plenary dialogue, team writing, and personal storytelling. The team co-created the scenarios out of their collective thinking; no topics were prescribed or proscribed. During both the conversations in the workshops and the subsequent drafting of the team's report, every member of the team was given an equal opportunity to contribute, and none of their contributions were given greater weight than others. Betty Sue Flowers, the editor of the report, patiently worked to take

account of every input, iterating and circulating tens of drafts. Furthermore and without precedent for such a politically sensitive undertaking, Insulza committed to the team that he would publish their report as they wrote it, rather than as the OAS or member governments would have wanted it written.

The central tension in the team was between the government officials who were trying to make current drug policy work and the non-governmental activists who were trying to reform it. Their positions were not symmetrical: the officials both had more formal power and responsibility and felt more defensive of the status quo. Each side was skeptical and mistrustful of the other. During the first workshop, one official told me he thought the reformers were smoking marijuana in a hallway and I thought I smelled it too. This accusation was not only untrue but ridiculous, and in retrospect I was amazed that I had taken on board so much of the mutual suspicion that I was able to smell a non-existent odor.

Eventually our careful attention to the way the project was set up paid off. After much back and forth, in the workshops and on email and conference calls, the team agreed on the text of their report. It discussed several alternative futures where governments departed radically from the war on drugs strategy, including the possibilities of some countries ignoring the international treaties and allowing drug traffickers free passage through their territory; of health-based rather than security-based policies; and of experimentation with new ways of regulating drugs, such as decriminalization, depenalization, and legalization.

Insulza kept his promise and sent the report to Santos and the other government leaders as written. It was the first time that an officially mandated document had discussed possible ways of dealing with drugs other than the established way. Contrary to the expectations of many observers, the OAS had permitted an uncontrolled process and the results were innovative and important.

Santos said: "The four scenarios in this report are not recommendations of what should happen or forecasts of what will happen; they simply provide us with realistic options, without prejudices or dogmas." The Financial Times said: "The report, prompted by Latin American governments that have long chafed about the violence they suffer in fighting drug-traffickers, is both useful and novel. It is useful in that it gathers many of the facts and experiences that have shaped global drug policy, be that outright suppression to decriminalisation. It is novel because it explores multiple scenarios if different policies are then applied." Insulza said, "The report had a huge, immediate impact. It managed to open up a discussion as frank as it was unprecedented of all the options available. It has set a 'before' and an 'after' in our way of addressing the drug phenomenon."

After a year of tough work, I was thrilled with our collective achievement. I was also furious that I had had to push so hard to get my OAS counterparts to go along with the way of working that I was advocating: involving all actors, including opponents and enemies; maintaining a transparent process; and giving the team control of the text. Once I calmed down, however, I could see that I was angry at them for the same behavior that I myself was

exhibiting: doing everything in my power to have things be my way. When it came to working under pressure on something that mattered to me, apparently I, like many people, preferred forcing to collaborating.

This project did not solve the problem of drugs in the Americas. It did not itself produce a new policy or plan of action. But what it did do was produce a set of radically new shared narratives of alternative possible futures (the four scenarios) and important new working relationships among the protagonists (especially between the officials and the reformers). Together with other developments in the drug policy world during that same year (especially marijuana legalization in Uruguay and the U.S.), we opened up new possibilities for the future of drug policy in the Americas and beyond, including greater openness to hitherto off-limits options such as experimentation with alternative models for regulating demand and supply, practices for reducing the harms of consumption, reforms of prison sentencing, and revisions to the global treaties. The project helped this social system, which had been stuck for 40 years, get unstuck and move forward.

This project also demonstrated that multi-actor processes in complex contexts cannot be predicted or controlled, at three levels. First, in a world where goods, people, money, and knowledge flow increasingly freely, the production and consumption of various kinds of old and new drugs by a multitude of legal and illegal actors cannot be predicted or controlled. Second, the views and positions on drug policy of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders from around the world cannot be predicted or controlled, which is why it is increasingly difficult to enforce a uniform global policy regime and why the project's multiple scenarios—and especially the possibility of experimenting with different policy options—were plausible and valuable. And third, as I learned from my intense year of collaboration in this diverse team, the outputs of a collaborative process cannot be predicted or controlled. How can we navigate through such unpredictable and uncontrollable situations?

Feeling our way forward

Many organizations can and do employ some variation of the rationalist plan-agree-implement model. A government can debate and pass laws that its officials can then enforce. A company's executives can make decisions that their subordinates will implement. Parties can sign contracts that they then execute.

But tough collaborations involving participants from across different organizations usually do not and can not work in this way. The participants don't agree with or like or trust one another enough to be willing to commit to any plan of action other than one that is modest, short term, and low risk. More fundamentally, given that they are participating in the collaboration voluntarily and provisionally, with no one having authority over others, participants always have the option of defecting. Collaborators do what they want to do, and so attempts to force or cajole them into doing otherwise don't work. This is why the route of tough collaborations cannot be predicted or directed.

Management professor Peter Senge points out that this is true of work not only across but also within organizations: "Most leadership strategies are doomed to failure from the outset. Leaders instigating change are often like gardeners standing over their plants, imploring them: 'Grow! Try harder! You can do it!' No gardener tries to convince a plant to 'want' to grow: if the seed does not have the potential to grow, there's nothing anyone can do to make a difference." Collaborating is like gardening.

Even when collaborators are willing to commit to a plan of action, these commitments and plans usually produce only the beginning and not the end of a process of change. I learned this in South Africa and Guatemala, where the remarkable constitutional settlement and peace accords respectively did not "solve" these countries' problems, but only marked milestones in multi-generational processes of growing new national systems.

Moreover, in a complex and contentious context, the only way we can know if a plan will work—if the parties will take the actions they have committed to, and if these actions will have the intended impact—is to try it. It is dangerously unrealistic to assume that your idea will work as planned. In these contexts, the only sensible way to move forward is to take one step at a time and learn as you go.

Collaborating therefore involves more than making a deal or an agreement. It is an ongoing and emergent process in which it is more important to act than to agree. What is therefore crucial is to create the conditions under which participants can act freely and creatively, and in doing so discover a way forward. Success in collaborating does not mean that the participants agree with or like or trust one another: maybe they will and maybe they won't. Success means that they are able to get unstuck and take a next step.

So collaborating is not about formulating, agreeing, and executing plans. It is about making our way forward amidst continued contestation, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Deng Xiao Ping, the leader of the Chinese Communist Party, used a memorable image to describe taking such an approach to China's transition towards a socialist market economy: "We are crossing the river by feeling for stones."

Organizational theorist Karl Weick tells a similar story, perhaps apocryphal, about a group of soldiers on military maneuvers in Switzerland:

> The young lieutenant of a small Hungarian detachment in the Alps sent a reconnaissance unit into the icy wilderness. It began to snow immediately, snowed for two days, and the unit did not return. The lieutenant suffered, fearing that he had dispatched his own people to death. But the third day the unit came back. Where had they been? How have they made their way? Yes, they said, we considered ourselves lost and waited for the end. And then one of us found a map in his pocket. That calmed us down. We pitched camp, lasted out the snowstorm, and then with the map we discovered our bearings. And here we are. The lieutenant borrowed this remarkable map and had a good look at it. He discovered to his astonishment that it was not a map of the Alps, but a map of the Pyrenees.

Weick's thesis is that people find their way forward not necessarily because they have a good map or plan. Instead it is because they "begin to act, they generate tangible outcomes in some context, and this helps them discover what is occurring, what needs to be explained, and what should be done next." This is the dynamic I have observed in collaborative teams, who typically make progress not by carefully executing an excellent plan, but by acting and learning from this acting. When things go well, they do this (like the soldiers) with hope, alertness, energy, flexibility, and mutual support.

The alternative to executing an agreed plan is experimenting. This means trying out ideas that you think will work and then paying attention to and learning from the results. It takes courage to move from thinking about acting to actually acting because, in many contexts and cultures, experimenting and failing is understood to be dangerous.

My long-term collaborator Jeff Barnum once illustrated the process of creative experimentation to me with a video made from time-lapse photographs of Pablo Picasso making a painting of a matador. Picasso starts out by making a few rough marks on the canvas and then adds detail and color. He changes and paints over what he has done again and again. At one point he obliterates a stunningly-rendered bull's head that is right in the center of the piece. Barnum explained:

> The creative process is a process of finding, not of projecting something already seen and known in one's mind. Artists do not manifest an already-finished mental picture; they hunt in a distinct medium, within the limits of its inherent properties, for an arrangement of that medium that accords with an inspiration. We see Picasso destroy as willingly as he creates. One has to be willing to let go in a kind of fierce way—to fiercely overcome any tendency to hold on to cherished parts at the expense of the emergence of the whole. Picasso is not after a beautiful face or a wonderful hand: he's after a whole composition that conveys specific ideas and feelings. He finds the form that serves the function. The needed inner gestures here are fearlessness in letting go of what isn't working and boldness in proposing new solutions.

Barnum and I often discussed our work with reference to the U-Process that Otto Scharmer elaborated in his book *Theory U*. The U shape refers to the movement from sensing to presencing to creating. Barnum made the crucial point that at the outset of this process, we cannot yet see what we will create: it is "around the corner" of the bottom of the U. The word creativity is used so loosely that we often pass over its essential meaning, which is to bring forth something that does not yet exist.

The discipline required to discover a way forward experimentally and creatively is to try something out, to step back and look at the result, and to change it, iterating over and over. I understood this discipline from writing books, where even if I had spent months thinking about and outlining what I wanted to say, it was only when I wrote it out and looked at it that I could know what made sense and what I needed to rewrite. I could only produce a good text by reworking a bad text a hundred times. Betty Sue Flowers facilitated this same iterative creative process during the collective writing of the drug scenario report.

Working in this way also requires being able to look at a still-inadequate and -incomplete result without becoming frightened ("I am a failure!") or attached ("This *must* be right!"). Instead you need to be able to maintain an equanimity in an ambiguous situation where you don't know how things will turn out, or when or even if you will succeed. The poet John Keats called this "negative capability," which he defined as "being capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."

One of the reasons tough collaboration is daunting is that you need to undertake this kind of patient and relaxed experimentation and iteration—and to do so not only privately, like a painter or poet, but together with your opponents, on issues that really matter to you, risking having your failures exposed publicly. This is the challenge that was so frightening to the participants in the immigration project.

How to move forward together

A tough collaboration starts when a group of people think that the situation they are facing is unacceptable or unsustainable and that none of them can transform it alone. They choose to try to collaborate because they think that neither adapting nor forcing can work.

Collaborating can produce five types of outputs: shifts in the relationships among the participants (especially a reduction in enemyizing); new understandings or insights into the situation they are dealing with and what they can do about it; clearer or stronger commitments to act; particular initiatives or courses of action; and increases in their capacity to work together in this way. These outputs can in turn transform the situation, through the emergence of some combination of five types of outcomes: new alliances among the participants and their organizations and networks, and new narratives, approaches, policies, and institutions. The drug project produced most of these outputs and outcomes, and so contributed to transforming drug policy in the Americas.

Collaborations can produce these outputs and outcomes at different scales. The participants can get together in events of a few hours or days; they can engage in processes that extend over weeks or months; or they can build platforms to work together over years. All of these methods enable teams, including people who don't agree with or like or trust each other, to find their way forward. The longer a team works together in this way, the more significant the outputs they can produce and the outcomes they can achieve.

Collaborating does not always mean agreeing or acting together. Sometimes it only means meeting, talking and fighting, and not agreeing on much at all, and then acting separately but now informed and somewhat more connected and aligned as a consequence of having met. So a collaboration is often organized less like a unitary team than like a network of independent actors. Most of the cross-organizational collaborations I have been involved in have operated for brief periods as a team working all together and for longer periods (often years) as a network working separately but in relationship.

The most critical factor for the success of collaborations is whether the necessary ingredients or preconditions are in place. The members of the team need collectively to have the capacity to be able to effect the transformation they are intending: the power to influence the system from their different positions. They need to take an approach that is generative rather than degenerative, including by alternating between talking and fighting and escaping from downloading and debating. They need to have the requisite resources—time, relationships, money—to effect the transformation they intend. And they need guidance from people, either inside or outside the team, who have experience with this unconventional kind of work.

The final ingredient required for collaboration is less obvious: a well-constructed container. This means a physical, political, and psychological space or structure within which the team can do their work. A container is the way a collaboration is set up, including who convenes and governs and operates it, and its ground rules, who participates, and where they meet. Different containers have different properties and enable different types of conversations; consider, for example, the differences between conversations in a legislature, court room, board room, living room, shop floor, and sports field. Collaboration requires a container that helps the participants, including those who don't agree with or like or trust one another, meet and talk and fight and find ways forward.

Like a pressure cooker, a container must be strong and safe in two complementary ways. It must protect the participants from distraction or manipulation, and at the same time it must maintain the pressure and focus needed to do this challenging work. A container with these properties enables collaborators to feel able to try out new, unfamiliar, risky ideas, relationships, and actions.

Tough collaboration is unpredictable and uncontrollable. The only way we can make our way forward is therefore to take one step at a time, sometimes together and sometime separately, experimenting and learning and adjusting as we go. This requires stretching.