

This post is the introduction to a new book entitled *Collaborating with the Enemy: How to Work with People You Don't Agree with or Like or Trust*, written by Adam Kahane of [Reos Partners](#) and forthcoming from Berrett-Koehler in June 2017.

## How to Work with People You Don't Agree with or Like or Trust

We face the same basic challenge everywhere: at home and work; in business and politics; with community and national and global issues. We are trying to get something done that we think is crucial. To do this we need to work with others. These others include people we do not agree with or like or trust. And so we are torn: we think that we must work with these others and also that we must not. Collaboration seems both imperative and impossible. What do we do?

The reason such collaborations seem impossible is because we misunderstand collaboration. Our conventional understanding of collaboration is that it requires us all to be on the same team and headed in the same direction, to agree on what needs to be done and be able to get this done, and to do what the task demands of us. In other words, we assume that collaboration can and must be under control.

But this conventional assumption is wrong. When we are working in complex situations with diverse others, collaboration cannot and need not be controlled.

Unconventional, stretch collaboration abandons the assumption of control. It gives up unrealistic fantasies of harmony, certainty, and compliance, and embraces messy realities of discord, trial and error, and co-creation. Such stretch collaboration enables us to get things done even in complex situations with people we don't agree with or like or trust.

	Conventional Collaboration	Stretch Collaboration
How we relate with our collaborators	Focus on the good and harmony of the team ( <i>one dominant whole</i> )	Embrace conflict and connection ( <i>multiple diverse wholes</i> )
How we advance our work	Agree on the problem, the solution, and the plan ( <i>one best possibility</i> )	Experiment our way forward ( <i>multiple emergent possibilities</i> )
How we participate in our situation	Change what other people are doing ( <i>one super-creator</i> )	Step into the game ( <i>multiple co-creators</i> )

Stretch collaboration requires us to make three fundamental shifts in how we work.

First, in how we relate with our fellow collaborators, we must stretch away from focusing narrowly on the collective goals and harmony of our team, towards embracing both conflict and connection within and beyond the team.

Second, in how we advance our work, we must stretch away from insisting on clear agreements about the problem, the solution, and the plan, towards experimenting systematically with different perspectives and possibilities.

And third, in how we participate in our situation—in the role we play—we must stretch away from trying to change what other people are doing, towards entering fully into the action willing to change ourselves.

Stretch collaboration is challenging because all three of these stretches require us to do the opposite of what seems natural. Rather than shrink away from complexity and conflict, we must plunge into it.

These stretches require us to pluralize: to move away from paying attention only to one dominant whole, one best possibility, and one super-creator, towards attending to multiple diverse wholes, multiple emergent possibilities, and multiple co-creators.

It is never straightforward to get things done in complex situations with diverse others. Energies must be mobilized; needs must be balanced; actions must be taken. Stretching does not make this work disappear; it just enables us to do it with less fear and distraction and more connection and awareness. The proverb says, “Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.” After enlightened stretching, we still have our work to do, but now we have a better chance of doing it successfully.

This book presents a theory and practice of stretch collaboration. Chapter 1 explains why collaboration is necessary and why it is intrinsically difficult. Chapter 2 suggests a way to decide when to collaborate and when instead to force, adapt, or exit. Chapter 3 specifies the limitations of conventional collaboration and the conditions under which it is applicable. Chapter 4 outlines stretch collaboration and Chapters 5, 6, and 7 elaborate the three stretches it entails: embracing conflict and connection, experimenting a way forward, and stepping into the game. The conclusion offers a program of exercises to put these ideas into practice.