

# **ToL: TRANSBOUNDARY COLLABORATION IN THE INSECURE WORLD**

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## **THE VOLATILE TERRITORY OF COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION**

Independently of the domain, whether business, education, healthcare, or military affairs, the goal of traditional response to complex challenges is to reduce output variability in an environment of high input variability – it is the effort to impose order upon chaos. The stages of that process have been described by the now increasingly popular OODA Loop of John Boyd. Typically, with large enough institutions associated with substantial fiscal, manpower, and technical resources, or in situations of relatively limited complexity, the efforts of transforming chaos into order and converting uncertainty-based operations into maintenance of routine status quo are moderately successful.

However, transboundary situations like mega-scale crises and disasters, international or even global-scale security operations, or complex law enforcement activities are invariably associated with unavoidable elements of unpredictability and the concomitant uncertainty. Inherent to all transboundary events is their constantly changing dynamic nature that creates continuous demand for accurate and timely knowledge, acquired both horizontally and vertically, from internal and external sources of each response organization.

Acquisition of knowledge is not enough: it has to be transformed into a unified body that promotes mission execution, facilitates efficient attainment of identified and emerging goals, and assures the required flexibility of conduct. To be truly effective, all these functions need to be rooted in promote and facilitate by shared vision, shared trust, and common understanding; only then success becomes a realistic outcome of all efforts.

In transboundary environments, the process is of knowledge extraction and expertise identification, conversion, analysis, and employment is complicated by the participation of typically large, and often multinational, number of political, military, and business entities.

Habitually, all entities participating in JIIM-type (Joint Interagency, International, Multinational) events have different hierarchies, cultures, and modes of operation which, despite the best efforts of the involved actors, are largely incompatible with each other, frequently serve own parochial interests at the expense of the unity of purpose, and amplify rather than reduce chaos and redundancy of effort. Best intentions notwithstanding, as many national and international initiatives continue to show quite clearly, interagency cooperation and collaboration continue to elude, typically at the immense fiscal cost, and not infrequently at the increasing cost of human lives.

## THE BACKGROUND OF TEAMS of LEADERS (ToL)

Faced with the rapidly expanding complexity of missions whose profile diverges increasingly from the traditional combat role (kinetic operations), and where active mission participants/partners are often represented by civilian political, business, and social entities, the United States European Command was forced to develop entirely new concepts on which to build cooperation and collaboration both within its own highly structure, but also with the outside partners in the joint effort. The concept of Teams of Leaders (ToL) emerged as the result of that transformation.

ToL represents a revolutionary approach to collaboration and cooperation among people and bureaucratic entities. Developed by several thinkers of the US Army, it has been intensely tested and practiced with the great success in some of the highly complex and challenging JIIM environments. Following operational success within the testbed of the US European Command (EUCOM), ToL is now transiting as a concept governing cooperation and collaboration across the entire Army enterprise and also as a concept underlying the entire sphere of joint operations.

The demonstrable success of ToL attracted attention to its substantial potential in purely civilian context, and the utility of ToL has been positively scrutinized in domains as distant as business, disaster management, national security, healthcare, law enforcement, and community improvement.

## THE NATURE OF TOL

The emergence of ToL has been facilitated by the explosive growth of technology and its increasingly rapid penetration as a unifying element through the entire depth of modern society: for the first time a concept emerged that intimately binds technology and people and multiplies the power of both by maximally utilizing the fused capacity of either.

The “three legs of the ToL stool” consist of Information Management (IM), and Knowledge Management (KM) and high performing team building. The unprecedented power of ToL is the result of the functional combination through collaboration of the three hitherto separate disciplines that permits/stimulates the development of shared Skills, Knowledge, and Attitudes (SKAs) both horizontally across disciplines, organizations, functions, and cultures, and vertically – throughout organizational hierarchies. The spread is “virus-like” through co-option of “champions” eager to share successful “best practices.”

Shared trust and confidence are the natural consequence the process of team building whose principal social outcome is the generation of High Performing Leader Teams HPLTs. The latter interact and collaborate across boundaries of organizations, functions, levels, and culture. The collaborative interactions among HPLTs foster the most fundamental aspect of any collaborative effort – the condition and state of *actionable understanding*.

In essence, implementation of ToL concept increases transboundary mission understanding, enhances mission focus, and reduces inter-organizational friction and bureaucratic parochialism. The overall outcome is, therefore, a prominent reduction of output variability, maximized utility of effort, and operational focus centered on strategic rather than subordinate goals.

Extensive use of IT/IM/KM e.g., Web 2.0, social networking technologies, video conferencing, etc., facilitates all processes taking place within the ToL focused environment. “Time = Zero/Distance = Zero principle” is one of the cardinal attributes of ToL-based operations. All collaborative exchanges are truly multidimensional and are performed at the same time horizontally (peer-to-peer), vertically (down-up and up down within hierarchies), regardless of time, and

independently of space. They become simultaneous, all-inclusive, and self-expanding through co-option.

While not a panacea, ToL offers several cardinal advantages: it serves as probably the most effective High Performing Leader Team builder. It fosters transboundary HPLT collaboration thereby creating the environment of cooperating Teams of Leaders unified by shared, mission oriented actionable understanding. The latter is critical for the development of effective crisis and disaster preparedness *at all levels*. During operations, ToL based practices allow near-immediate generation of task oriented “action swarms” and task-focused implementation of “just-in-time” solutions. Finally, ToL serves as a force multiplier in the development of organizational, multi-organizational, and community resilience. Thus, in contrast to traditional emergency response organizations, ToL-based entities are always both anticipating and making sense of the chaotic environment as steadily increasing champions on the ground collaborate across former boundaries to solve problems. While ToL does not impose order upon chaos, it reduces chaos by developing means of its containment (and even elimination) based on ToL-contingent presence and operational implementation of actionable understanding.

## WHAT ToL IS AND WHAT ToL DOES

In essence, ToL can be viewed as a tight coupling between people and the widest possible range of polydomain knowledge management methods and techniques that serves as a force multiplier in operations conducted in complex collaborative environments:

**ToL = OKM (organization knowledge management\*) +**

- JIIM leaders teamed informally right, left, up, down across boundaries of organization, function, level or culture to solve problems
- And High Performing Leader Teams due to developed shared SKA ( shared purpose, shared trust, shared competence, shared confidence) generated by collaboration building relationships ("soft power") and when required for purpose-oriented ground operations, training to standard ("hard power")
- Unity of purpose NOT unity of command, essential wherever, whenever decisions are made within - Whole of Government, Multinational, or across Government/Agency/Organization core enterprises - at all levels, across all functions

\*) Note that OKM is best described in the present context as “the whole of knowledge management methods, techniques, and practices” rather than by its standard accepted definition

## SIGNIFICANCE OF ToL

The importance of collaborative, team-based actions to aid decision-makers in developing accurate situational awareness became paramount in modern crisis and disaster response. US Congress, Department of State, FEMA, DHS, and DoD leadership have called on countless occasions for

multidisciplinary teams that span agencies, sectors, and levels of government that seek to empower not only those closest to the crisis but also to make assets out of disaster survivors.

In every crisis, effective crisis response requires active participation from and collaboration between the private, public, nonprofit and military sectors, each of which is vital to community disaster resilience. Hence, effective fusion of poly-domain human resources with smart information technologies and Web 2.0 social networking permit creation of the teams-based approach. Application of such approach has been both tested and proven to lead to rapid generation of actionable understanding that sustains unity of purpose, increases operational efficiency, and converts dissonant activities into a joint effort in which all actors contribute meaningfully, at all response levels, and regardless of rank or institutional affiliation.

ToL has been tested in the extremely rigorous environment of JIIM operations. It also proved to facilitate answers to most of the collaboration/cooperation problems that affect DHS, DoD, and Department of State. It is, therefore, imperative that the largest possible number of members of civilian agencies of government (federal/state/local), academy, business, and NGOs are exposed to the method that meaningfully utilizes all technological advantages without regard to platform or the mode of operations

ToL is the unique concept that not only empowers people through maximized use of technological resources, but whose center of gravity rests at the bottom, operational tier rather than the distant, bureaucratic top. The methods used to implement ToL-based operations are now tested, practiced, and firmly established within the joint military establishment to such degree that publically available ToL coaching manual has been released, and further implementation materials are in the process of generation. It is, therefore, both advisable and essential that the largest possible segments of the US civilian sector are exposed to ToL through the unique blend of theory and practice that proved so effective in Europe. ToL works, and ToL helps to solve insolvable problems!

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