



# CROSS-CULTURAL RELIGIOUS LITERACY

COLLABORATIVE COMPETENCY



Literasi  
Keagamaan  
Lintas  
Budaya



TEMPLETON  
RELIGION  
TRUST

CROSS-CULTURAL RELIGIOUS LITERACY

# COLLABORATIVE COMPETENCY

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PERKUMPULAN

 institut  
**Leimena**

# **Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy: Collaborative Competency**

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# INTRODUCTION

Praise be to Allah, God Almighty for His mercy and grace, so that we can publish a book series entitled “Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy: You, Them, and What Can Be do Together.” The publication of a series of books in both Indonesian and English aims to increase literature references related to the concept and implementation of Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy (CCRL) in Indonesian society as well as the world.

Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy (CCRL) is an approach to thinking, acting, and acting to be able to work together with different religions and beliefs (collaborative competence), based on an understanding of the moral, spiritual framework, and personal self-knowledge (personal competence) and people. other religions and beliefs (comparative competence).

CCRL is based on the belief that awareness and belief that the common good for humanity will be achieved not when the diversity of religions and beliefs is rejected or merged into uniformity, but precisely when the diversity is affirmed and managed together by different adherents through a process of evaluation, communication, and negotiation. together to respond to various opportunities and challenges faced, both in local and global contexts

We would like to thank the authors of this Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy book series such as Dr Chris Seiple, Dr Alwi Shihab, Prof Dr Amin Abdullah, Dr Ari Gordon, Rabbi David

Saperstein, Rabbi David Rosen, and Rev. Dr Henriette T. Hutabarat Lebang, and other writers

We realize that there are still many shortcomings in the writing of this book, for that we expect suggestions and constructive criticism for improvement.

Finally, I hope that this book will be of use to both CCRL training participants, educators in schools, madrasas, universities, policy makers, and the wider community.

Jakarta, June 3, 2022

# CCRL'S COLLABORATIVE COMPETENCY

*By Chris Seiple*

**T**he collaborative competency is about partnership and leadership in a complicated and complex context—such that the process and product of your project is positive.

I will illustrate this competency with a case study from Vietnam. In hearing this story you might think, “Well, I could never do that!”

Yes, you can! How do I know? Because you do it every day—in your relationships with your family, friends, professional colleagues, etc. The relational principles are exactly the same. If you are going to get something done in this world, you will have to be in partnership, even relationship, with people who do not believe or act as you do.

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Before we consider Vietnam, let's remind ourselves of the world we live in. Our global challenges are so big, so complex—from the environment to extremism—that they require all of us to respond. There is no government or no non-governmental organization that can solve these kinds of issues alone. So, it's not a question of if but when you partner with somebody who believes differently than you do.



So how do you do the partnership? How does one cross toward the other individual and/or institution? How do you lead?

The key is engagement. Every engagement has common principles. But every engagement is different, according to that specific context, and the relevant (potential) partners. Which is to also say that every engagement requires preparation. You have a responsibility—to your moral beliefs, to your religious beliefs, to your job, to your country, and to our world—to be prepared. You have to evaluate the context, to include the people and the players, and how you might negotiate and communicate with them.

This process is also known as leadership. It is best done with a posture of humility & honor, patience & perseverance, compassion & courage. As noted in the introductory chapter, Listen and Observe with your heart, Verify with your mind, and Engage with your hands. This kind of L.O.V.E. is a leadership that seeks to get the questions right while never sacrificing one's own moral beliefs. In so doing, dignity is given to the other, as mutual respect is built.

There is you, the other, and what you do together.

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From 2006 to 2021, the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), which I led from 2003 to 2015, worked with different elements of the national and provincial government(s) of Vietnam to train over 4600 people from government, religious communities, and civil society in issues related to the role of religion, and religious freedom, in society and the state, security and citizenship.

If you look closely, however, it is an unlikely alliance, that is, the Vietnamese government working with IGE. On the one hand, the Vietnamese government is just that, a government that is large, complex and bureaucratic, as all governments are. Its workers are officially Communist and therefore atheist (although many worship Buddha and/or their ancestors). And, Vietnam had fought a war with America

On the other hand, the Institute for Global Engagement was a non-governmental organization (NGO), of 10-15 people. It was not bureaucratic. Its employees, however, were Christian, according to the founding principles of IGE.

In 2005, I met with a man named Mr. Thuy. He worked for the government, from the top-down. I worked for an NGO, from the bottom-up. He was Vietnamese. I was American. He was from the Kinh people. I was of German-Danish descent. He had family members killed by American bombs. My father dropped bombs on Vietnam. We did not trust each other.

So we signed a very small agreement (we called it a "Letter of Intent"). We decided that we could not even take baby steps, crossing toward each other, only little "spider-steps." We agreed, in writing that: 1) The Americans would bring a delegation to Vietnam; 2) the Vietnamese would bring a delegation to America; and, 3) we would do a conference together in Hanoi.

And, if we still liked each other at the end of these three small steps, we would sign another agreement to work together.

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Now, before we go any further, you might be thinking: "I would never be in this situation."

But take a moment to think about your friends, colleagues, family. Maybe you don't have a signed agreement with them, but, if you think about it, you're always evaluating, always negotiating, and you're always communicating. In short, you're always setting up next steps in that relationship or project—whether you realize it or not. You are always living by the contract you have with your work, your friends, your family—whether it's written or not.

And you are accountable to that contract, especially if you want it to continue. This is life.

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So, as individuals representing very different institutions, of very deep difference, Mr. Thuy and I created an agreement to work together, building confidence in each other through very small steps (Although I should note, Mr. Thuy took a much bigger risk than me, having to convince others in the government that I could be trusted.)

A Vietnamese delegation came to America in February of 2006, made up of government officials and religious leaders. We took them to the top-down of American government, introducing them, for example, to leaders on Capitol Hill. We also took them to the bottom-up of America, showing life outside our capital, to include lessons in how our country evolved. We took the Vietnamese delegation to Williamsburg, Virginia (I'm a Virginian), and we learned about religious freedom, as well as slavery.

We had great conversations, but the point is twofold. First, we brought some people over from Vietnam, from their bottom up and their top down, pastors and government officials, to experience our bottom up and our top down.

Second, as you go on these trips and as you ride in vans, and as you walk around these places, you are doing it—together. You are building relationships, professional, and/or personal. You are crossing toward them, and they toward you.

Next, we took the same kind of delegation to Vietnam. As part of the bottom-up experience there, I asked to visit a village where there had been reports of governmental harassment and persecution. So the government let us go where no western NGOs had been before.

During the June 2006 visit to Vietnam's Northwest Highlands, we used dug-out canoes to cross over a swollen river that had washed out the bridge to this very remote village. We visited with them. We prayed with them. The situation got better.

And then we had a September 2006 conference in Vietnam's capital, Hanoi, on religion and the rule of law—the first in Vietnam's history.

International experts came and we discussed how the transparent rule of law might be applied as Vietnam transitions

At the end of the conference, we signed another agreement—upgrading from a “Letter of Intent” to a Memorandum of Understanding—to work together, detailing our next set of practical steps. We were able to work with each other because we had created a context for collaboration—because we both had to evaluate, negotiate, and communicate with each other as we sought to understand ourselves, and each other.

We continued to work together, and when Mr. Thuy retired, we worked with his replacement, Mr. Bui Van Nghi. The institutional relationship continues to this day, as the 4,600+ people across Vietnam—who have been trained in religion and freedom, security, and citizenship—can attest.

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Why did this collaboration work? What were the relational principles that were tailored to this specific context? And can they be applied to any context, that is, with a friend, a colleague, a family member?

There are four key principles: 1) find the story; 2) work top down and bottom up, building trust; 3) understand the self-interest involved; and, 4) take the steps together, celebrating their accomplishment, together.

**#1: Find the story.** On one of my first trips to Hanoi, I visited a museum and found this quote from Vietnam’s founding father on the wall:

“The teaching of Confucius has a strong point; i.e., self-improvement of personal virtue. Jesus’ Bible has a strong point; i.e., noble altruism. Marxism has a strong point; i.e., a dialectical working method. Ton Dat Tun’s doctrine has a strong point; i.e., their policies are suited to conditions in our country. Does

Confucianism, Jesus, Marx and Ton Dat Tun share common points? Yes. They all pursued a way to bring happiness to human beings and benefit to society. If they were still alive today, and if they were grouped together, I believe they would live in harmony, like close friends I try to become their pupil.”

—Ho Chi Minh, 1949

Ho Chi Minh, who is revered across Vietnam, and across generations, is saying, we need a table. The government should provide a table where different perspectives can gather, such that we learn from them.

This quote, which I used to introduce our work, every time, gave permission for their culture to participate in the story of building tables where everybody gets a seat. There’s always a local story that allows for inclusion.

**#2: Work simultaneously from the top down and the bottom up, building trust.** Whatever the context, there is always a top-down and bottom-up. If it’s the national scene the top-down is the president and the national government, working on policy and laws. The people would be the bottom-up, governed by the policy or by the law.

But in a family, it might be the parent (top-down) and the child (bottom-up). In a madrasah, it could be the teacher and the student. In the village, the elders and the families. There’s always a top down and a bottom up. Collaborating with partners to accomplish projects always takes place at the intersection of the top-down and the bottom-up.

The key in the whole process, I think, is building trust, creating relationships—usually through mutually candid and courteous conversations. I have found that there is a spectrum of engagement in the collaborative competency, that moves from the transactional to the transformational. By “transactional” I mean the understanding that if I help you, you will help me. If we work together, we will serve the self-interest of each of us.

But over time the more you interact with each other, a relationship begins as you cross toward the other, toward the transformational. In fact, I begin to see not only my self-interest but my very identity in my neighbor, and vice-versa.

In July of 2006, amidst that first, “spider-step” agreement with the Vietnamese government, I was asked to testify in the U.S. Senate. I told the senators that there were certainly challenges in Vietnam, but that there were also good things happening, that I had personally witnessed.

In June of 2018, the Vietnamese government awarded its peace medal to the Institute for Global Engagement. After the ceremony was over, a Vietnamese official came up to me and shared that he and his colleagues in the government had been watching my senate testimony twelve years before. He said, “You were honest about our challenges, but you were also honest about our progress. And because of that we trusted you. And that is why you have been allowed to work here for 12 years.”

Did I know that they were watching? Did I know any of that? No. I was simply trying to be honest and humble, to testify to the situation that I had seen. Today, because of this precious and ongoing trust, IGE can still visit anywhere in Vietnam.

**#3. Understand the self-interest involved.** As the relationship deepened and expanded, we became aware of other issues they wanted to address, in order to make their country better. Government officials wanted a comparative analysis of how other countries around the world addressed the rule of law. We convened the experts and case studies, and translated the relevant resources, such that they could make better decisions in their context.

Government officials wanted to know more about the relationship between religion and security. We convened the experts and case studies, and translated the relevant resources, such that they could make better decisions in their context.

Government officials wanted to know more about the relationship between religion and conflict resolution. We convened the experts and case studies, and translated the relevant resources, such that they could make better decisions in their context.

**#4: Take the steps together, celebrating their accomplishment, together.** Over the years, in all of the interactions with the people and government of Vietnam, did we tell them what to do? Never. Our job is to walk with them as their friend, and to provide opportunities that they may not have, to learn from other case studies, and resources. We speak to the problems in private, and we celebrate the progress in public.

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In conclusion, it is important to say the obvious about this case study: we did not engage Vietnam to make them look like us. We engaged each other—across very deep difference—to serve each other's self interest, becoming friends along the way. It is possible, but always remember: it takes honesty and humility, patience and perseverance, compassion and courage—from both “sides”!

\*This document has been prepared for the Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy (LKLB, for its acronym in Indonesian) program, October 2021 – June 2022

# RESOURCE PERSON PROFILE

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