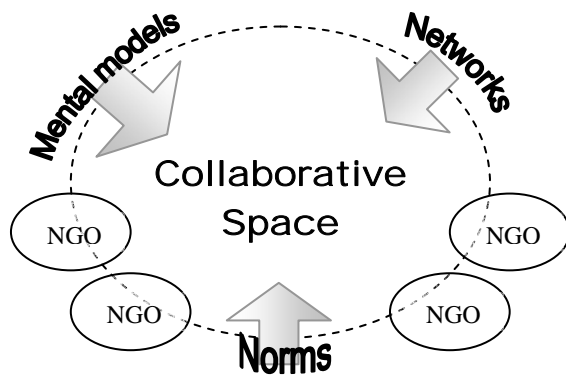


# The Power of the Space Between

by Ben O'Dell

While a limited amount of study has been completed on spirituality in organizations, very little research on spirituality has been completed organizations that are themselves spiritual or religious. In this research, I studied the AIDS/HIV Alliance with the Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organizations. At the outset, research and experience informed the development of a hypothesis that religious identity could drive religious behavior within organizations, specifically collaboration. To test these concepts in the reality of faith-based organizations, I completed 6 interviews with seven people. These interviews challenged the assumptions I had made about the influence of these two organizational elements on each other and changed my hypothesis about the relationship between religious belief and collaboration. Instead of religious belief influencing the behavior of faith-based organization, I found that religious belief influenced the environment in which collaboration occurred or the space between the individual groups. I analyze data collected through these interviews to describe how religious belief and personal spiritual expression influences mental models, networks and norms that enabled and promoted better collaboration. Major exploratory findings include the following points:

- A faith-based organization is first and foremost an organization. The hard reality for many faith-based NGOs is that the faith-based identity of the organization most primarily serves the organizational purposes.
- The faith-based nature of partnering organization as a greater influence on relationships than it does on individual behavior. This influence is made by impacting the environment which is defined by the mental models, the networks and the norms held by and between organizations.



- New opportunities for faith-based NGOs may be possible by recognizing environmental impact of faith-based identity as well as enabling a tension faith-based identity and their organizational capacity.

Ben O'Dell works grassroots faith-based and community organizations on a daily basis as an Associate Director at the US Health and Human Services Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. This project contributed to his completion of his Masters in Organizational Development & Knowledge Management at George Mason University. He looks forward to using his experience and research skills to help non-profits best serve their community.